LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE SHAVUOS

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON SHAVUOS

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

With praise to the A-mighty, I am presenting a collection of essays on the Holiday of Shavuos

These messages were taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years. Some of them appeared around the Festival of Shavuos while others were taken from the weekly messages on the Torah portions that recount the narrative of the giving of the Torah. For the purpose of this occasion, I have reviewed these messages again, edited them slightly and added some insights here and there.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on, or adaptations of specific points in his essays and discourses. Some of the messages were taken from other sources, but, in most cases adapted, amplified and expanded, and/or entirely altered. These

essays were intended for an audience that includes those for whom citing sources and using Hebrew terms would make their reading of the text more cumbersome. I have therefore not cited the sources for much of the quotes from Biblical, Talmudic, Midrashic and Chassidic literature.

* * *

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash that "The time of your Redemption has arrived." The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

The essays on Shavuos are particularly relevant to Redemption. According to Tanya, the revelation of Mattan Torah was

temporary and will become a permanent fixture in the Messianic Age.

It is my heartfelt hope that this effort at disseminating teachings about Moshiach will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah. And may this effort, in turn, contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

Heschel Greenberg

5 Sivan, Erev Chag Hashavuos, 5777

Williamsville, New York יע"א

ESSAY ONE
THE EMBRACE OF SINAI

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THE EMBRACE OF SINAI

Compulsory volunteerism

Shavuos, the upcoming Jewish Holiday, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is arguably the most important event in all of Jewish, if not all of human, history. It marks the time that G-d revealed Himself at Mount Sinai, and communicated the Torah and raison d'etre for the very existence of the universe, through the Jewish people to the entire world.

When the Jewish people were told that they would receive the Torah at Mount Sinai, they apparently appreciated the momentousness of the event and they therefore enthusiastically exclaimed, "*Na'aseh v'nishmah*-We will do it and we will hear it." This implied that they

were prepared to accept the Torah even before they knew what commandments it contained.

Yet, when the Torah describes the way they stood at Mount Sinai, the Talmud comments that G-d had to "place the mountain over them" thereby **compelling** them to accept the Torah.

Why, our Sages wonder, did G-d have to compel them to accept the Torah when they already enthusiastically expressed their absolute willingness to accept the Torah?

Psyched

One answer that reveals some insight into human psychology is that, on the contrary. Precisely because we were so "psyched" about the prospects of receiving the Torah, we then recoiled when we came so close to realizing our greatest desire.

So great was their desire to receive the Torah that when the Jewish people were told upon leaving Egypt that they were going to receive the Torah in fifty days, it immediately

generated a feeling of yearning and anticipation for this momentous event. They even began to count the days, demonstrating their anxiousness and eagerness to receive the Torah.

Indeed, the counting of days was actually more than just an expression of anticipation. It was also a manifestation of their desire to refine themselves so that they would be worthy of the Torah. And the more they refined their character, the more their souls became sensitized to spirituality. The more sensitized their souls became, the more they realized the incredible holiness and awesomeness of the occasion. It was much like the anticipation and love that grows day by day in anticipation of one's marriage. Every day of preparation just increases the love and intensifies the yearning for the bride and groom.

And just as they had gone through seven week's of intense preparation and "psyching themselves up" for their rendezvous with G-d at Sinai, they recoiled in horror! The more they became aware of what awaited them, the more overwhelmed and humbled they

became, to the point that G-d had to envelop them with the mountain, which was G-d's way of leading them into His embrace.

Apprehension is normal

One very basic lesson that can be derived from this narrative is that when a person exhibits a certain measure of resistance to a spiritual experience, it is not necessarily a sign that they are opposed to it. On the contrary. Human nature often puts up the greatest resistance to something that we want so badly and are so awed by the prospects of actualizing that desire. Our reaction is to remain static, paralyzed by the fear and awe of the impending experience. At times like this, we appreciate G-d "twisting our arms" enabling us to march forward and receive that for which we so yearned and prepared ourselves.

There is also a parallel for our generation in particular. For thousands of years — not just 49 days — the Jewish people, and indeed the entire world, has been searching, hoping and yearning for the time when universal peace

would prevail. This hope — known to Jews as the Messianic Age, ushered in by the Moshiach, — we were told by many of the greatest Jewish leaders of most recent times is almost upon us. We are standing on the very boundary between exile and the Age of Redemption. Yet, there is a palpable feeling of reticence, apprehension and even resistance by some.

We shouldn't worry. The Holiday of Shavuos has already prepared us for this eventuality. As we are poised to enter into the awaited transformation of the world with the coming of Moshiach, we are likely to experience a certain measure of spiritual paralysis. But, we are also assured by the past experience associated with Shavuos, that G-d will ultimately take us into His embrace, and give us the strength to realize our greatest dream and love.

ESSAY TWO

TO EMBRACE THE ETERNAL

ESSAY TWO

TO EMBRACE THE ETERNAL

Most Important Holiday

Reasonable people will argue as to which is the most important Jewish Festival. Some will say, what difference does it really make?

Chassidic literature claims that when it is Passover, Passover is the most important Holiday; during Sukkot, Sukkot is the most important Holiday. Since we are approaching the Festival of Shavuos, the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, we will argue for the pre-eminence of Shavuos over all other Holidays.

Indeed, the Zohar states that Shavuos is the "highest" of all Holidays. Thus, it is situated in between Passover and Sukkot. Its central position is indicative of its role as the core of all other aspects of Judaism. This unique quality of Shavuos is also reflected in the fact

that Shavuos is only one day (In Israel) whereas Passover and Sukkot are seven or eight day Holidays. The one day of Shavuos is expressive of the concept of unity and singularity.

Torah: The Source of Inspiration for All Mitzvos

We must attempt to understand what it is about Shavuos that makes it so singularly important.

Even a cursory examination of the subject leads us to the conclusion that it is Torah that makes Shavuos so special, because Torah itself enjoys a special status even in comparison to other commandments as our Sages declare: "And Torah study is equivalent to all of them."

Thus, when we come to grips with the importance and pre-eminence of Torah, we will also better appreciate the uniqueness of the Festival of Shavuos.

The 613 commandments are said to correspond to all the components of the

human body. Each limb has a Mitzvah that is geared to it and is intended to make it holy. Torah study is said to correspond to the brain. Just as the brain is the most important organ of the human being and is the source of life for all the other parts of a person, similarly, Torah study is considered to be the most important Mitzvah and is the source and inspiration for all the others.

The Three Levels of Torah Study

When a Jew studies Torah, s/he can do so for a number of legitimate reasons. One can study Torah in order to know how to live as a Jew. In this capacity, Torah study is a means to an end, albeit a very noble end — the observance of the Mitzvos. This is analogous to the role of the brain as the source of life for the rest of the body.

On a higher level, one can study Torah "for its own sake." This means that one studies Torah because one senses that it is intrinsically a higher Mitzvah than all the others, This is analogous to the status of the brain as the most vital organ of the body.

Torah in this frame of reference is the most important Mitzvah; it is in a class by itself.

There is, however, a third and even more exalted reason for Torah study. This is the study of Torah because it is G-d's wisdom.

In this mode, Torah transcends the very concept of a Mitzvah.

A Jew's approach to Torah study has thus been likened to a child who has not seen his father for a long time. When the child is finally reunited with his father, he embraces his parent and kisses him profusely. His embrace and expression of love for his father is not in any way connected to any benefit he may derive from his father. It is not even his way of fulfilling his filial obligation. It is pure unadulterated and unconditional love for his father.

Similarly, the ultimate motivation of a Jew to learn Torah is not the benefit that he derives from it, including the ability to perform the Mitzvos. It is not even for the ability to perform the exalted Mitzvah of learning Torah.

The real motivation should come from the tremendous love one has for G-d. Every time we learn Torah, we are "embracing" G-d Himself. There can be no greater and more rewarding experience.

Torah Study in the Messianic Age

To be sure, we are not all ready to learn Torah on this lofty level. To experience this pure love we must have the feeling of love for G-d as a child loves his father.

In the Messianic Age, we will all experience this third and highest level of Torah whenever we study. We can, however, get a glimpse and taste of all these levels, during the Festival of Shavuos when we connect with Torah in its purest, most lofty form.

Question Disappears

Now, to return to our original question. Which of the Holidays is the most important?

In light of the above discussion, there is no need to search for an answer to this question. It is quite clear that unmitigated love and

unadulterated study of Divine wisdom cannot be surpassed.

Instead, let us expend our energies to internalize the ideal of Shavuos — the ideals of Torah, through which we connect with the core of Judaism.

And may you all have a joyous and inspirational Shavuos Holiday.

ESSAY THREE

THE ALEPH OF JUDAISM

ESSAY THREE

THE ALEPH OF JUDAISM

The Most Fundamental Commandment

Shavuos is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. At that time G-d uttered the Ten Commandments that represent the foundation of all of Judaism.

Of all the Ten Commandments, our sages tell us, the Jewish people actually heard only the first two. After the first two, they were so overwhelmed that they could not bear to have G-d speak to them directly. Instead, they asked Moses to transmit the remaining commandments to them.

The fact that they only heard the first two commandments directly from G-d, suggests that these two commandments represent the foundation of all the others, and actually include within them all 613 commandments of the Torah. By hearing these two

commandments it was as if they heard all the others as well.

Of these two commandments, even more fundamental is the very first commandment, which declares:

> I am the L-rd your G-d who has taken you out of the Land of Egypt.

All of Judaism, the Talmud asserts, rests upon this one mitzvah, of belief in G-d.

The Alpeh: Most Fundamental Letter

Kabbalisitc thought goes one step further.

If the first commandment is the foundation of all the others, then it stands to reason that the first word *Anochi* ["I"] is the foundation of the first commandment and, therefore, the first letter of that word, "Aleph," is the foundation of the first word, and, by extension, of all of Judaism.

What is it about the letter Aleph that is so fundamental to Judaism?

The Rebbe explained that the letter Aleph has, at least, three meanings. It means

"master," "mentor" and "mystery." This reflects the three aspects of G-d's relationship with our world, upon which all of Judaism is founded.

The first aspect of the Divine that we encounter is the realization that the world cannot exist without a master. Even the most primitive mind can appreciate the role of a Creator who is responsible for our very existence and for everything that we have.

We can easily comprehend why this is the foundation of Judaism. Without the recognition that there is a Master who is responsible for everything, we would not have the notion of responsibility and accountability. Everyone would be their own master and the world would degenerate into anarchy. All of Judaism's' practices would be irrelevant since there is no authority to whom we must answer.

Aleph: Mentor of the Universe

But, recognizing that the world has a master does not suffice. Beyond this realization one must also gain the awareness that this G-d is

more than just a Master, He is also our Mentor and Guide. He provides us with a Higher consciousness, just as a teacher introduces the student into a new world, totally foreign to the world to which the student has heretofore been exposed.

Similarly, G-d, through the Torah, introduces us to a level of consciousness that transcends anything the world could appreciate on its own. Whereas recognition of a Higher authority and Master can come from one's own observation, the knowledge that G-d imparts to us as our Teacher and Mentor can only come from Divine revelation.

Beyond these two aspects of the Aleph, there is a third and even higher manifestation of the Divine represented by the rearranged spelling of the word Aleph that reads *Peleh*, and means wonder or mystery.

There is an aspect of G-d that is absolutely unknowable and unfathomable. No matter what level of comprehension we might have of G-d and His Torah, we must recognize that there is infinitely more that we cannot possible comprehend.

This approach will always keep us on our feet and whet our appetite to go higher and higher, while it will simultaneously, add a sense of excitement because of the elusiveness and mystery of G-d.

Our sages have pointed out that the Hebrew word for exile is Golah, while the Hebrew word for Redemption is Geulah. In the original Hebrew both words share the same four letters, of Gimmel, vov, lamed and hei. The sole difference between the two words is that Geulah (redemption) also has an Aleph inserted in it.

In the context of what has been explained above, we can appreciate the contrast between exile and redemption. In the state of Golah or exile, the world does not instinctively recognize that it has a Master and Mentor. The world is certainly not privy to the ultimate mystery of the Divine reality. In many places society has actually regressed and degenerated into anarchy.

Society has also chosen for itself other "mentor-g-ds" such as the media and popular culture that often cater to our most base

instincts. With these influences, we certainly do not see the mystique and beauty of G-d.

In the state of redemption, however, all of existence will be permeated with the three m's of G-d; that He is Master, Mentor and the ultimate Mystery.

Shavuos is the appropriate time to relive the experience of hearing G-d teach us our first Aleph!

ESSAY FOUR

REVERBERATION

ESSAY FOUR

REVERBERATION

The Unique Sound of Sinai

Shavuos is the anniversary of the most momentous occasion ever. On this day, over 3300 years ago, G-d revealed Himself to the entire Jewish people on Mount Sinai and gave them the Torah.

When the A-mighty uttered the Ten Commandments everyone trembled. The words spoken by G-d were more than just sensible and proper modes of behavior He was advocating. The Torah represented G-d's wisdom and plan for the universe.

Accordingly, our sages inform us that the sound of the Ten Commandments reverberated throughout the entire world and did not produce any echo.

What is the significance of the fact that the sound of the Torah reverberated throughout the world. G-d willing, in the next essay we will discuss the significance of the fact that the sound of the Ten Commandments had no echo.

Seven Noahide Commandments Reiterated

That the words of G-d reverberated throughout the world was a meaningful way of illustrating how the Torah is Universal. And in three ways:

First, while the Torah was given exclusively to the Jewish people it relates to the entire world. The Seven Noahide commandments that were previously given to Noah and his sons were reiterated at Sinai and the Jewish people were entrusted with the responsibility to transmit these seven basic categories of law to the entire population of the world.

According to Maimonides, a person must follow these laws because they were given by G-d at Mount Sinai. Hence the revelation at Mount Sinai related to the entire world.

Stabilized the Entire World

Second, our Sages taught that until the Torah was given at Mount Sinai the entire world was hanging in the balance. The world was created with a stipulation. If the Torah would be accepted the World will continue to exist. If not it would revert to nothingness.

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, focuses on the words "*Yom Hashshi*-the Sixth Day." Why does the Torah use the definite article when it refers ot the sixth day of creation? What distinguished that day form all the other days of the week?

The answer is that it alludes to the sixth day of Sivan, when the Torah was given. That day was the day creation was truly completed.

The Talmud relates that when the Torah was given the Nations of the world were terrified and they came to the heathen prophet Bilam to inquire what was happening. They were fearful that the world was coming to an end.

Bilam comforted them and stated the Biblical verse: "G-d gave strength to His people and G-d blessed His people with peace."

Rather than the Torah upsetting the worlds standing it solidified it and brought peace and tranquility to the world.

Hence, the sound of Sinai reverberated throughout the entire world to declare that the whole world was now safe, secure, tranquil and at peace. It will endure because now the world has meaning and purpose.

Torah Affects Everything

Third, the reverberation of G-d's words at Sinai throughout the world was a meaningful way of illustrating how the Torah relates to every facet of creation. There is no nook and cranny that was not affected by the giving of the Torah.

Moreover, the objective of the giving of the Torah at Sinai is for us to transform the world through its Divine teachings. No part of the world can be left out of our mission. We must use the light of Torah to illuminate every part of the world, which includes our own little universe, as well as the macro universe.

The teachings of Chassidus and Kabbalah reveal to us how we affect parts of the worlds with which we have no contact. Whenever we perform a Mitzvah it sis connected to the entire universe in two ways.

For example: If we eat Matzah on Passover, that Matzah was produced by the wheat that grew in the earth nourished by the sun. It was further cultivate by the fertilizer and harvested by farm implements. All of these had their existence created by other forces. For example the tractor was produced by steel mined form the earth. The sun which provided light for the wheat is affected by its position in the entire cosmos.

Once we eat that Matzah it affects our bodies, which in turn influence our behavior towards others etc.

In short, every Mitzvah is facilitated by and influences myriad of other objects and experiences within our Universe.

Now since the Mitzvah is a Divine command, every Mitzvah we do elevates every part of the entire universe which was instrumental in and facilitated the performance of the

Mitzvah. And every part of the world the Mitzvah impacted will also have a ripple effect and change the entire world.

Because we are still in Galus-exile we cannot see the way the world has changed and changed irreversibly. In order for us to still have free choice all the dramatic and cataclysmic changes we have produced through our Mitzvos are imperceptible to the average eye.

However, with the imminent coming of Moshiach, every flesh will perceive the phenomenal changes in the world that will endure forever.

ESSAY FIVE

ECHO-LESS

ESSAY FIVE

ECHO-LESS

The Unique Sound of Sinai

Shavuos is the anniversary of the most momentous occasion ever. On this day, over 3300 years ago, G-d revealed Himself to the entire Jewish people on Mount Sinai and gave them the Torah.

When the A-mighty uttered the Ten Commandments our sages inform us that the sound of the Ten Commandments reverberated throughout the entire world and did not produce any echo.

In the preceding essay we explained in detail why it was necessary for the sound of Sinai to reverberate throughout the world. In this essay we will explain what is the significance the sound of the Ten Commandments having no echo and what possible lesson can we

glean from this miracle for our own lives. We know that we cannot emulate G-d's feat in not having an echo when we speak, so what usefulness is there for us to be informed of a miracle that appears to have no ethical or moral lesson.

No Needless Miracles

Furthermore, not producing an echo in a desolate area would go contrary to the laws of nature. Obviously, G-d has the power to do whatever He chooses, even to subvert the laws of nature that He Himself put into place.

The question that begs itself, however, is:

We know that G-d does not perform needles miracles. Miracles are performed with a clear goal and purpose. Whether it is to save someone or to demonstrate G-d's power to a G-dless society, there must be a utilitarian function for the miracle. Nature is also G-d's handiwork, so why would He want to subvert nature for no real objective? What was the possible benefit in G-d causing the sound not to produce an echo? Isn't this a rather

unnecessary abrogation of the laws of nature, which G-d cherishes as His handiwork?

Torah's Unique Power

The Rebbe, in his classic work, *Likkutei Sichos*, provides a beautiful and powerful answer to this question that sheds light on the very purpose of the Sinai experience.

There are two ways one could approach the relationship Torah has with our world:

Torah can be compared with other approaches to life, which informs us how yto live our lives. Adopting this approach to Torah, one can still be impressed with the depth of Torah that may outshine all other approaches secular and religious. However, in this approach we view Torah as a discipline among other similar disciplines.

There is however a second and totally different way of characterizing Torah. And it is this novel approach to the unparalleled wisdom of Torah and its relationship to the

world that is reflected in the Torah not having an echo.

G-d's Sound did not Bounce Off

An echo is produced when there are barriers to the sound forcing them to bounce off. The sound of G-d, when He said the Ten Commandments, did not have an echo because G-d's sound penetrated and permeated every aspect of existence within the universe. The Divine words were absorbed by every being.

Not only did the sound of Sinai reverberate throughout the Universe; it actually entered into and became one with it. Torah's reach was not only in terms of its breadth; it was unique also in its depth.

In fact Torah is unique in that it cannot ever change. It is immutable.

We see how Torah is unique in terms of its breadth, depth and length.

Torah is not just a book that informs us of how we can live a good and exalted way of life. It is a Divine force that can and must be internalized within each and every one of us.

All other systems, which may on occasion resemble some of the Torah's teachings, cannot permeate the world because the world predates all man-made ethical systems and in which the opposite dynamic is operative. The world with its demands forces us to make accommodations in our ethical practices. Ethics is needed to serve the world of nature. It cannot totally alter the course of nature.

Torah is the very opposite. It preceded Creation and its goal is for it to assume its rightful position of supremacy; where the entire world absorbs and is dictated by Torah..

For Judaism to survive it is crucial that the words of Torah do not "bounce off" us and our children. When we impart the teachings of Judaism, especially during the Shavuos Holiday when the Revelation of Sinai is reenacted, we must see to recapture the spirit of Sinai so that the Torah and Jewish way of

life is absorbed and internalized within each and every one of us.

How to Combat Galus Deception

The obstructive and deceptive nature of Galus-exile places a smokescreen even over Torah. This is particularly true in the modern era where secular values and attitudes have been so powerful and have negatively influenced the lives of so many.

That is why it is crucial to learn the inner light of Torah revealed in the teachings of Chassidus. These teachings not only shed light on the world around us to see nature in a different light; it also illuminates the Torah itself. It places Torah in its rightful place of ultimate truth and ultimate reality.

In the imminent Messianic Era, the entire world will see Torah as the force that dominates nature and has ultimately penetrated and absorbed by the world.

ESSAY SIX

YES OR NO?

ESSAY SIX

YES OR NO?

Responsive

Our sages describe the scenario of the giving of the Torah at Sinai in the following manner:

When G-d would make an affirmative declaration (Such as "Remember the Shabbos"), the Jewish people would respond with the word "yes. Conversely, when G-d would utter a proscriptive statement (such as "Do not commit murder"), their response was "no." This scenario is recorded in the name of the Talmudic sage, Rabbi Yishmael.

Rabbi Akiva, however, disagrees. According to Rabbi Akiva, the Jewish people's response was a uniform yes for all of the commandments. Whether it was an affirmative commandment or a proscriptive one, they responded with but one simple word: "yes."

A question begs to be asked: What difference does it really make what their response was? Does it really make a difference if in response to the commandment "You shall not commit murder" they said "Yes," meaning that they will comply with G-d's will, or if they would have said "no", implying they will not go against His will? Either way, it was clear that their intention was to totally accept all that G-d was commanding them. The entire dispute seems to revolve around semantics.

Furthermore, everything we learn about in the Torah must impart a crucial lesson for us. What possible lesson can be derived from the two opinions concerning the Jewish people's response to the Ten Commandments?

Two Approaches

Upon deeper reflection, one can discern two legitimate, but diverse, approaches to the observance of Torah and its Mitzvos. The following is based on a discourse of the Rebbe who discerned these two approaches and discovered that they were consistent with

the spiritual stature of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael.

One can take the approach that it really makes no difference what G-d tells us to do or not to do. The essential thing is to accept His authority and agree to do everything that He so desires. Whether G-d tells us to do something or not to do something we respond with the same determination and unequivocal commitment to conform to G-d's will. It is not the substance of the command that we dwell on, but on the fact that it is G-d's will regardless of the character of the Mitzvah.

In such an approach there is no room for subjective feelings. We perform the most enjoyable and exciting Mitzvah with the same sense of duty and "acceptance of the yoke" that characterizes our compliance with His directive to not do something we might be tempted to do.

Similarly, with this approach, there can be no distinction between one mitzvah and the other. Whether it is a rational mitzvah or one that defies logic, we observe each and every

Mitzvah with a uniform sense of duty.

This approach is expressed in the view of Rabbi Akiva that the Jewish people responded "yes" for all the commandments. The same affirmative declaration that accompanied their acceptance of the most dramatic and dynamics actions demanded by G-d, also accompanied their acceptance of G-d's commandment not to commit murder. Whatever emotional ties and subjective leanings they may have had to either of the categories did not register in their responses. The main sentiment was their complete surrender to G-d's will.

Working With Your Ego

There is, however, a second approach to Judaism, reflected in Rabbi Yishmael's view that they responded differently for the different categories of commandments. In Judaism, Rabbi Yishmael insists, one must go beyond surrender of ego and total unequivocal acceptance of the Divine will.

A Jew must also allow the Mitzvos we perform to reach into our psyches, emotions

and individualistic characters. Yes, even our egos and subjective characteristics must be affected by and involved in the process of serving G-d. A human being is not just a body and a soul. A human being has emotions, ideas and wants. And the Torah must relate to these individual human properties.

There are Mitzvos that are geared to activating our love for G-d and there are Mitzvos that are designed to activate our fear/awe of G-d. There is not a single human expression, whether intellectual or emotional, that is not in some way touched and refined by this or that Mitzvah.

Rabbi Yishmael, thus, insists that the Jews had to have responded differently for the different categories of Mitzvos. A mitzvah to do something positive – such as remembering the Shabbos – demanded an affirmative response that said: "Not only am I ready to surrender myself to G-d but I am also allowing the mitzvah of Shabbos to strike a responsive chord in my mind and heart. I will even have my feelings of joy and pleasure gravitate towards the Sabbath.

Conversely, the negative response to murder and other prohibitions was our way of declaring that not only will we not commit them, but also that they will be so utterly objectionable to us. Every fiber of our being cries out: "No! We will never countenance anything that goes against G-d's commandments." The utter revulsion that one experiences for one abominable act will never be the same for another one when one follows the path of Rabbi Yishmael.

Synthesis

The ultimate goal is to synthesize both views, of total surrender of our will to G-d's and to allow every commandment to strike a responsive chord within our souls.

True synthesis of opposite traits is easier said than done.

Just as we cannot imagine the co-existence of fire and water, so is it unthinkable to be consumed with a sense of dedication to a cause to the point of completely surrendering our egos—the approach of Rabbi Akiva—while, simultaneously, savoring the taste and

"getting into" the nuances and delight sof each and every Mitzvah experience—the approach of Rabbi Yishmael.

To achieve this extraordinary synthesis, we must express the essence of our soul, which is connected to the very essence of G-d. From G-d's vantage point, all opposites can be seamlessly harmonized.

The soul's essence does not easily express itself. Due to exile circumstances, the soul's essence is confined and unable to asset its dominance over the individual. At certain times of inspiration, such as on Yom Kippur, or during the Shavuos Holiday, we can feel our essential G-dly identity manifest itself.

It is this synthesis that will be attained, on a consistent level, in the imminent Age of Redemption. At that time, the obstructive elements that do not allow our essential G-dly nature to function will be removed.

We will then fully experience the Divine symphony, the combined and complementary benefits of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael's approaches.

ESSAY SEVEN
WHO KNOWS THREE?

The Galilean Lecture

A certain Galilean lectured before Rav Chisda:

> Blessed be the Merciful One who gave a three-fold Torah to a three-fold people through a third [born] on the third day in the third month... (Talmud, Tractate Shabbos 87a)

As we shall see, all of these threes are what makes Torah accessible to us and ensures that it will remain with us.

A Three-Fold Torah

According to Rashi, the three-fold Torah is a reference to the division of The Scriptures into three parts known by the acronym

Tanach: Torah (Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (the Prophets), Kesuvim (Holy writings).

According to Iyun Ya'akov, the three-fold Torah refers to the Written Torah, the Oral Torah and the esoteric, mystical dimension of Torah.

The division of the Torah into three makes the Torah more accessible.

The Five Books of Moses represent G-d's commandments that guide our lives.

The prophets provide the inspiration that encourages us to follow the Mitzvos.

The Kesuvim provide us with the mean of self0-expression. Much of the daily prayers are taken from the Psalms, one of the books in Kesuvim.

Likewise the Written Torah is the outline; the Oral Torah contains the substance and the fact that it was oral was the guarantee that we will always be linked to our forebears and that it will continue to be transmitted forever. The mystical teachings reveal the soul and spiritual dimension of Torah. It's what gives life and vibrancy to the Torah.

To a Three-Fold People

According to Rashi this refers to their division into three groups. Kohanim (priests), Levi'im (descendants of the tribe of Levi, other than Kohanim), *Yisroelim* (All other Jews).

The acronym for all these three in Hebrew forms the word: *Kli*, which means a vessel, or receptacle. This implies that when all Jews, regardless of class, are united, they are a proper receptacle for the Torah.

This is consonant with the saying of our sages that the Torah's usage of the singular form concerning the Jewish people's encampment at Sinai, (*Vayichan* as opposed to *Vayachanu*) is to teach us that the Jews, for the first time, were then totally united. This gave them the ability to receive the Torah.

Through a Third [Born]

Moses was the third child, born to his parents, Yocheved and Amram, after they had Miriam and Aaron.

Although Moses was the primary messenger who transmitted the Torah to the Jewish people, they still needed the inspiration of Aaron and Miriam, whose efforts were indispensable for their ability to accept the Torah.

On the Third Day

The Torah was given only after the Jewish nation had undergone three days of preparation for the momentous event of G-d's revelation on Mount Sinai. Great experiences need extensive preparation.

Unity alone is insufficient to be fully receptive to Torah. Even good leadership will not be a guarantee that the Torah will successfully be absorbed. One must also work on self-refinement. One can find unity even among people who are far from spiritual and ethical values. People can even have the best role models. Their unity and access to great leaders had to be augmented with self-purification.

In the Third Month…"

Sivan (the month in which the Torah was given) is the third month: Despite the fact that we observe our New Year on Rosh Hashanah, the Bible considers Nissan to be the first month, Iyar, the second and Sivan the third.

The fact that they did not receive the Torah immediately after their Exodus from Egypt was also due to the need for them to go through a refinement process. From the Exodus onward we count 49 days, known as Sefira, which has as its objective the refinement of all our character traits.

Although there were three days of intense preparation before the Torah was given it was not redundant. The purification process of Sefirah was primarily directed to cleanse themselves from the impurity of Egypt. The final three days were more of a form of sanctification in preparation for the holiest event in history. The former is referred to as Tahara-purification, and the latter as Kedusha-sanctification.

The Emphasis on the Number Three

A question begs to be asked. Why the emphasis on the number three with respect to the Torah? Wouldn't the number one be a more appropriate number that underscores the unity of Torah and its source in one G-d?

Moreover, isn't the objective of Torah to introduce G-d's unity into the multifarious world? Doesn't Torah unite the one who learns with G-d? Why then emphasize the number three?

Etz Yosef, quoting Yefei Toar explains the significance of the number three in terms of the Biblical verse: A three-fold strand will not unravel quickly."

This explanation still leaves room for further research. Granted there are definite positive messages in the number three as with virtually every number. Wouldn't the number one still be a more appropriate number to emphasize in relation to Torah? Isn't self-evident that the number that is most paramount in our discussions concerning G-d would be the number one? So why emphasize the number three?

Three Levels of Unity

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos*) provides us with a deeper answer that sheds light on the whole concept of unity. There are actually three ways one can express unity.

The first is to shun anything that appears contradictory. When a person shuts himself off from the rest of the world to devote his life to the one G-d, that unity is an untested unity. One does not know how this G-dly devotion will fare when it is tested by confronting its adversary.

The second approach to unity is to confront the adversary instead of just shunning it. When Torah thrives in spite of the hostile world, it demonstrates that Torah's uniqueness can withstand the pressures of the world. This unity is a tested one.

The third level of unity is when Torah not only survives other competing influences, but actually takes the adversary, channels it and transforms it into something holy and G-dly. That demonstrates that not only is the Torah impervious to all that surrounds it, but that

Torah can actually thrive because of the outside world that it had transformed.

Three Months, Three Levels of Unity

Nissan was the month of Divine Revelation that shunned the evil of Egyptian society and plucked the Jews out of it.

Iyar was the month when the Jews confronted their evil and resisted it.

Sivan, the month when the Torah was given and when G-d descended onto Mount Sinai, rather than lifting the Jews up to the mountain, was the month of synthesis and unification.

This then is the conceptual basis of the number three: We take the oneness of G-d and instill it in that which appears to be an adversary, resulting in a synthesis that is a third entity.

This third entity is, in truth, the ultimate expression of absolute unity; not only is G-d's existence singular, because He has no adversary or competition, but, moreover, in gact, everything that appears to be outside of

and hostile to Him is actually testimony to His singularity.

The Third Temple

We have been praying for the rebuilding of the third Temple. Whenever the future Temple is mentioned in classical sources it is referred to as the **third Temple.** Why is the fact that it will be the third so important?

Another question on the designation of the future Temple as the third is that, technically speaking, there were more than two Holy Structures in the past. There was 1) the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert; 2) The Temple in Shiloh; 3) the Temple in Nov; 4) the Temple in Givon; 5) Solomon's Temple; 5) The Temple identified with Ezra; 6) Herod's reconstruction of the Temple. So the "third Temple" will actually be the seventh one!

The answer is that despite all the other structures that served as Sanctuaries, the future Temple will embody the notion of Divine unity that is characterized by the number three.

Its distinction is that it will disseminate G-d's unity to the entire world, so that the ultimate synthesis will be achieved.

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ESSAY EIGHT

THE ULTIMATE AUDIO VISUAL EXPERIENCE

ESSAY EIGHT

THE ULTIMATE AUDIO VISUAL EXPERIENCE

Eyes and Ears Open

For centuries, Judaism combined audio and visual instruments in its teaching of Judaism. From the time we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Jewish nation was engaged in the transmission of both a written and oral Torah. Both the eyes and ears played crucial roles in learning and teaching, as students alternated between reading the Biblical text and listening to their teacher expound on its deeper meaning.

This audio-visual experience was most pronounced when G-d revealed Himself at Mount Sinai. At that moment, the intermingling of the senses was absolute and unprecedented. The Torah describes this unique audio-visual experience as one in which "they saw the thunder and heard the

lightening!" This unparalleled phenomenon was, at first glance, an unnecessary departure from nature. What was G-d's purpose in performing this miracle?

The Rebbe addresses this issue by first providing an analysis of a most elementary difference between seeing and hearing will provide us with some insight to this dilemma.

Seeing is Believing.

When we see things with our own eyes, it confers automatic acceptance of the even as absolute truth about which there can be no doubt or debate. No matter how farfetched is that which we laid our eyes upon, it will not detract in the least from the certainty that we have of the existence of that object, event or experience.

Certainty is less easily achievable through hearing. No matter how reliable the reporter delivering the information is, if the information is not credible and cannot be rationally substantiated, we will remain unimpressed. Indeed, even if what we've heard is rational, reliable and believable,

there always exists the potential for it to be refuted. In the best of circumstances, the most credible information we process through hearing remains remote, while the most incredible information we access through vision seems near.

Our world is one that provides us with the opportunity to reach and grasp for everything, material or spiritual. But, there is a difference between the two. Physical phenomena are things we can behold with our eyes, leaving an indelible imprint on our consciousness. We are thus not just influenced by the material world surrounding us through our ability to see it, we become a part of it, as it becomes a part of us.

Spiritual and G-dly experiences, to be sure, are not outside the purview of our senses. Intellectually we can hear and understand matters of the spirit. But, no matter how confirmed the analysis, the information remains distant. It is something we know, not something we are or become.

Tables Turned

At Sinai, the tables were turned. All of the things that people normally accessed aurally; all of the ideas that they could grasp intellectually, they were now able to see.

In other words, the Sinai experience enabled every Jew to integrate the G-dly revelation as though it was a simple, down-to-earth event. The reality of G-d and His teaching was evident to everyone. That was what made the Revelation at Sinai unique and unprecedented.

Simultaneously, all experiences normally accessed visually, now seemed remote. It is not that physical experience no longer existed, it did, but physicality was not the dominating aspect.

Reclaiming Sinai

In the Messianic Age, the world will once more realize the Sinai experience, but on a permanent basis. The salient difference will be that then it will be on a permanent basis. To be sure, in the future Age of Redemption

there will still be a physical and material existence, but our primary and more direct experience will be the richer aspects of life, the G-dly dimension, as we see the world for what its true worth.

The enduring values and experiences will be etched in our mind and soul, while the physical will be appreciated for its true worth: as instruments and vehicles to carry out the Divine will.

May we all have a joyous and meaningful re-acceptance of the Torah this Shavuos, by actually **seeing** the unfolding of the Messianic drama and realizing the actual Redemption in its full glory, when it will be Shavuos all year long.

ESSAY NINE
THE CONVERSION AT SINAI

ESSAY NINE

THE CONVERSION AT SINAI

Waiting for Yisro to Arrive

Shavuos marks the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai, at which time He uttered the *Aseres Hadibros* (popularly known as the Ten Commandments and more accurately as the Ten Statements).

What prompted G-d to give them the Torah at that particular time? Why did G-d wait seven weeks from the time they left Egypt to give them what was the ultimate purpose of their liberation? The entire Exodus was predicate don the Jewish people receiving the Torah, as G-d expressly told Moses, "when you will take this people out of Egypt you will serve G-d on this mountain."

According to our Sages, it was the arrival of Yisro, Moses' father-in-law, and his joining the Jewish people nation that precipitated the

momentous event of Sinai. Only when Yisro arrived, was G-d "prepared" to give the Torah to the entire Jewish nation.

The connection between Yisro and the revelation at Sinai is forcefully expressed in the name of the Torah portion in which the story of the giving of the Torah first appears. It is in the portion entitled Yisro, named after tis enigmatic individual, who starts his career as a pagan priest and ends up becoming, arguably, the most illustrious convert to Judaism.

The fact that this portion is so significant and Yisro's role so pivotal begs the question: Why is Judaism's most momentous occasion is associated with Yisro, a convert to Judaism, Why not name this parsha with a word that more directly and eloquently expresses history's most important event such as "Torah," "Sinai," or some other more dramatic and meaningful name?

In short, why is Judaism's most important event inextricably bound with a convert to Judaism?

Collective Conversion

One approach to this matter is that Yisro – a convert to Judaism – was not the exception to the norm. He was emblematic and representative of what occurred at Mount Sinai for all of the Jewish people.

Our sages inform us that the experience of Sinai constituted the conversion of the entire Jewish people. Whatever status they enjoyed before could not compare with their new and exalted status they acquired at Sinai.

Indeed, many of the laws of conversion are derived from the narrative of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. It was therefore natural for G-d to have linked His revelation at Sinai to Yisro, the first convert (who was not a member of the children of Israel, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) to underscore the nature of that experience as one of collective conversion.

Yisro was not just a convert; he was the paradigm for the conversion of all the Jews at Sinai.

The question we must address now is how can we describe that which transpired at

Sinai as a conversion? What was it that changed dramatically at Sinai? Even before Sinai the Jewish people observed many of the Mitzvos. Was it the commitment to observe additional Mitzvos that justified referring to Sinai as a conversion process? Conversion is a quantum leap into a new identity. Why would a quantitative and incremental addition of Mitzvos qualify as a conversion process?

Self-Transcendence

Before the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai there were many things a person could do to become a better and even a more spiritual person. It was not possible, however, for people – no matter how hard they tried – to go beyond their potential.

Translated into simple terms this meant that no matter how hard one tried to connect with G-d, one could not succeed in getting anywhere beyond one's own inherent parameters. The way were created was the way we were destined to remain, with but incremental adjustments here and there.

The rationale for this is obvious. G-d created us to be mortal and finite beings. By definition a finite being cannot, no matter how hard one tries, get closer to an infinite Creator. All that the observance of Mitzvos before Sinai could achieve was to make the person into a better person, a more complete creation – within the confines of creation.

The Recreation of the Jewish People

All this changed at Sinai. For the first time in history, G-d decreed that through the observance of the Mitzvos (the same Mitzvos one did before as well as additional ones) it was possible for one to break out of the mold of being a mere creation of G-d. One can access the Divine and rise above the confines of one's physical existence.

In effect, Sinai represented the recreation of the Jewish people. They were now not a people governed by the same conventions of nature. They were now given a totally new potential. Now they have the power to rise above the world and transform it into a dwelling place for G-d. The inauguration of

this potential occurred at Sinai some 3,300 years ago. The complete realization of this potential will occur with the true, complete and imminent Redemption. Then, the entire world will see the connections we made to Hashem through the observance of the Mitzvos.

ESSAY TEN
SENSITIVITY TRAINING

ESSAY TEN

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

The Ten What?

Without question, the most distinguishing factor of the Festival of Shavuos was the Ten Commandments.

Parenthetically, it should be stated that the correct phrase is "Ten Statements." The total number of commandments in the Torah are actually 613. These "Ten statements" reflect the first set of G-dly teaching that serve as the foundation of all of Judaism.

Moreover, these Ten Statements actually contain within them all of the 613 commandments.

The giving of the Ten Commandments (or: Ten Statements) was the world's single most spiritual experience. Never before and never since did G-d reveal Himself to the world as

He did at Mount Sinai. With this revelation, the world was exposed to the most lofty G-dly experience.

So powerful was this event that the Torah relates that the Jewish nation begged Moses to take over and relay G-d's words to them. They could not endure the powerful G-dly light that accompanied the giving of the Torah.

Incongruous

Yet, when we juxtapose the sublime nature of the revelation of Sinai – described in the Torah reading of Yisro – with the very end of the parsha, a stark contrast emerges.

The very last verse deals with a rather mundane commandment concerning the building of the altar in the Temple. To climb onto the altar in the Temple, the Torah commanded them to build a ramp and not a staircase. The Torah provides the reasoning that using a staircase would require taking large and "immodest" looking steps. By contrast a ramp would allow them to take shorter and more modest appearing steps.

The question begs to be asked. What connection does this unusual commandment have with the revelation at Sinai. And secondly, why would the parsha conclude with this commandment as if this was the end result and objective of Sinai?

Teaching Sensitivity to a Stone!

To answer these questions it would serve us well to know the reason for this commandment concerning the altar.

Our sages comment that the reason for not alighting on a staircase is to teach us sensitivity to others. "If the tones of the altar – which do not feel any shame – should not be disgraced by taking wide immodest strides while alighting the altar, certainly a person who is fashioned in the mold of His Creator, should not be subjected to any shame."

In simple terms, the objective of this commandment is to condition us to always be sensitive to the feelings and dignity of others.

Oblivious

When we think about the objectives of Sinai, we might incorrectly conclude that G-d desires us to be pure and spiritual, to the extent that we become oblivious to our surroundings and the needs of others. After all doesn't G-d want us to rise above this physical world and become like angels?

But our parsha concludes by teaching us to what degree we must be sensitive of another's feelings. And while G-d certainly wants us to rise above the constraints of the physical world; He doesn't want us to achieve that goal by ever losing touch with the feelings of others.

Thus, by concluding with the theme of sensitivity – that even when one walks onto the stones of the altar they must not denigrate their honor – our Torah portion demonstrates that no matter how high one can go – even if he or she climbs onto G-d's altar in the Temple and is soaring to the heaven's – one must never lose sight of another's needs and feelings.

A story is told of Rabbi Dovber – the second

leader of Lubavitch – who was once deeply engrossed in his studies. His young baby who was sleeping nearby fell out of his cradle and started to cry. Rabbi Dovber was so engrossed in his studies that he was oblivious to the child crying just a few feet away. His father, Rabbi Schneur Zalman – the founder of the Chabad Lubavitch dynasty – who lived in an upper story and who was also deeply engrossed in study, heard the baby's cries, descended, picked up the baby, and rocked it back to sleep.

Thereupon, he rebuked his son and told him that no matter how deeply engrossed in one's studies, one must never be deaf to the cries of a child, literally and figuratively.

Infantile Adults

The objective of Sinai is also to be sensitive to the cries and needs of those Jews who – because of circumstances beyond their control – remained children in terms of their Jewish knowledge. We must be sensitive to their needs and the silent cries of their souls.

Our sages tell us that the experience Jews had

at Sinai was but a temporary one. It will become permanent, however, during the Messianic Age. Just as the parsha that deals with the giving of the Torah at Sinai concludes with teaching about sensitivity while on the heights of holiness, it is certainly applicable today as we stand on the threshold of the Redemption. It behooves every one of us to hear the cries and cater to the needs of our fellow Jews and indeed the entire world.

One of the salient characteristics of Galus is that no matter how sophisticated we may be we are still spiritual infants.

In response to our reaching out to those whose souls are crying out for attention and spiritual help, G-d will take us, the Galus, adult-infants and introduce us to adulthood with the imminent coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY ELEVEN

JUDAISM 101

ESSAY ELEVEN

JUDAISM 101

Mislabeling

One of the most prevalent examples of mislabeling occurs in this week's Torah portion: The Ten Commandments. They are referred to in the Torah as the Aseres Hadibros, or the "Ten Statements." The Torah actually comprises **613** commandments. The Aseres Hadibros represent one grouping of commandments, but by no means is this an exhaustive list of the Mitzvos.

The question thus begs itself. Why did G-d choose these Ten Statements out of all the 613 commandments to be part of His initial communication to the Jewish people?

Upon close reflection, we realize that these Ten Statements espouse fundamental principles that are relevant to all of Judaism

The Foundation of All Commandments

The first two statements represent the basis of all the Mitzvos of the Torah:

> "I am the L-rd your G-d who has taken out of the Land of Egypt from the House of Bondage,"
>
> "You shall have no other g-d's"

The affirmative statement, that G-d is our G-d and liberator, is the basis of all Positive commandments. When we realize the role G-d plays in our lives, we feel compelled to acknowledge His presence by following His will and performing all the other commandments.

The second statement that forbids us to have other g-ds forms the foundation for the observance of all the proscriptive commandments. When a person acts in defiance of G-d's will they are—albeit, subtly—repudiating G-d.

The World Quaked

The third statement not to say G-d's name in vain, refers specifically to a person who

swears, invoking G-d's name, in vain. When G-d uttered these words, our sages tell us, the entire world shook.

What distinguishes this transgression from all others?

The answer lies in the unique nature of this sin. Instead of doing something in spite of G-d's will to the contrary, this individual who swears, invokes G-d's name and introduces G-d into his transgression.

By this statement, the Torah teaches us that, in reality, whenever we go against G-d's will and "contaminate" ourselves we "drag" G-d into the impurities with which we are associated. (See next essay for a more comprehensive analysis of this commandment.)

Fourth Statement: Affirming Creation

The fourth statement to observe the Shabbos is more than just one commandment among many others. Shabbos observance is tantamount to observing the whole Torah. It is our most dramatic way of declaring with

our whole essence and being that we believe that G-d is our Creator—who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh—and Liberator.

When one observes the Shabbos they give testimony to G-d's role as the Creator and by this they show Him honor in a dramatic and concrete fashion.

This explains our Sages declaration that Shabbos observance will bring immediate Redemption. If the Messianic Age is the Shabbos of existence, when the entire world will pay homage and honor the one G-d, our observance now is a foretaste of the future.

Parents: G-d's Paradigm

The fifth statement to honor parents was intended to give us a worldly model for the honor we must accord G-d. The Talmud states that G-d has equated the honor of our parents with the honor of G-d. By honoring a parent, we are vicariously, honoring G-d and conditioning ourselves to accord Him honor directly, as well.

This explains why honoring parents is in the first tablet, which is dedicated to the "man-to-G-d" obligations. Honoring parents is one concrete way we show honor to the "other" Partner.

Relationship with G-d Depends on Relationship with Others

The second tablet consists of five statements that deal with our relationship with others, without which our relationship with G-d is flawed. Not to kill, commit adultery, and not to steal (according to the Talmud "kidnap", but, by extension it includes all forms of theft) represent G-d's declaration to us that we should respect the lives, relationships and resources of others.

These are fundamental principles without which one cannot be conscientious about any of the other social commandments in the Torah. When we show respect for life, relationship and resources of others, we have essentially acquired the foundation for proper behavior in all aspects of life..

We are All Witnesses

The commandment not to bear false testimony can be understood is a statement that expresses what we do wrong **whenever** we transgress. The prophet Isaiah declared that, "You are My witnesses." We are here to show the world that there is a Higher Authority who controls everything and to whom we are beholden. Whenever we transgress we bear false testimony and misrepresent G-d to the world.

Establishing Boundaries

And the last statement "Not to covet," i.e., not desire what belongs to someone else, is the ultimate ingredient necessary for respecting the rights of others. This statement establishes the need to recognize the boundaries that G-d instituted in this world. A Jew must realize that what is not their own is totally out of bounds and one should not even consider taking it.

While it seems hard to not desire that which is not ours, it is the ultimate goal of the sensitization process that the Ten Statements

embody. And while it may seem as an elusive goal, it is not out of reach, at least to some degree.

As the Ibn Ezra puts it: It would not occur to a peasant to desire marrying the princess, or a child to desire his mother. We can condition ourselves to feel the same way about anything that is not ours.

The Final Statement and the Final Redemption

However, the complete realization of this last statement and ideal will occur in the future age of Redemption. That this is a Messianic ideal is evident from the way in which Maimonides' concludes his description of the Messianic Age in the very last paragraph of his Halachic encyclopedia, the Mishneh Torah:

> "There will be no jealousy and rivalry... because the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea."

One who is imbued with the knowledge of G-d—the fulfillment of the first Statement, "I am the L-rd your G-d"—will have absolute

and total respect for the integrity of all others as well.

Indeed, the very last vice we will have conquered in the Messianic age is the one that allows us to be content with what we have and have no need to measure what we have relative to others. This is the essence of the very last commandment, not to covert, and it seems it will be the final human flaw to be corrected, as Maimonides concludes his treatment of the future with the knowledge that there will be no more jealousy.

ESSAY TWELVE

EARTH SHATTERING NEWS

ESSAY TWELVE

EARTH SHATTERING NEWS

A Seismic Event

When the A-mighty declared, "Do not bear G-d's name in vain"—a reference to giving a false oath, invoking G-d's name—the entire world trembled." (Talmud, Shevuos 39b)

What was so earth shattering (pun intended) about giving a false oath, using G-d's name in vain? It is strange that the Talmud makes no such claim about any of the other more heinous crimes enumerated in the Ten Statements. Why is giving a false oath more devastating to the world than idolatry, murder or adultery?

The Talmud addresses this question and answers that it is because in certain ways it is a more serious breach than the other commandments and it is reflected in the way G-d punishes for it. But this too requires

explanation. Why is it treated differently from other serious crimes that are listed in the Ten Statements?

The three pillars

Iyun Ya'akov, a Talmudic commentator, answers, citing the statement of our sages in Pirkei Avos that the world endures by virtue of three things: Justice, truth and peace. When one gives a false oath, they undermine all three of these foundations. They pervert justice, distort the truth and create strife. If the very underpinnings of the world are removed, no wonder the world trembled.

One can still ask, even if one was to make a false statement in court— without a formal oath—they will still undermine justice, truth and peace. What is so different about a false oath?

The Dynamics of an Oath

One answer to this question requires a basic understanding of the dynamics of an oath in Jewish tradition.

Why is it that when a person testifies about any matter and gives his word that what he says is true, it may not suffice in a legal proceeding, and the court will impose an oath. If the person's words were not believed, why would we believe his oath? If a person could be suspected of lying, why would he be trusted with an oath? Furthermore, an oath is administered in many cases where the individual is suspected of theft. If the person were suspected of stealing, why would we trust his oath to the contrary?

Indeed, the Talmud (Bava Metzia 5b? makes the declaration that "one who is suspected concerning monetary impropriety is **not** suspected to swear falsely in court." But the question is, why?

Rashi addresses this question with the assertion that "people consider a false oath a more serious crime than theft." But, this assertion itself requires explanation as to why this is so. The Tosphos commentary answers by referring to the Talmudic statement "the world trembled when G-d said, "you shall not take G-d's name in vain." This, of course, brings us back to square one. Why did the

world tremble for this commandment more so than for any other?

Implicating G-d in a crime

The explanation for all this lies in the difference between all other transgressions and a false oath. When one commits any crime, they go against G-d's will. It is a lapse, a momentary denial of G-d.

When one swears falsely, using the name of G-d, however, they are deliberately invoking G-d's name, as if to say, "G-d is my witness that what I say is true." The crime here is not doing something evil in spite of G-d, or ignoring G-d, as in all other transgressions, but it is doing something evil **because** of G-d. G-d becomes one's accomplice in the evil act itself.

Moreover, our mystical ages explain that when one makes an oath they access a more powerful manifestation of G-d. Swearing falsely, in G-d's name, is to sully and contaminate the most sublime G-dly forces.

While every violation of the Torah adversely

affects one's own personality, it does so by drawing a wedge between oneself and G-d. It distances the individual from G-d to the possible detriment of the individual. It does not however, threaten the stability of the world, because G-d remains the foundation of the world that cannot be shaken or removed.

When, however, one uses G-d for falsehood and actually "drags" Him into the crime, instead of distancing himself from G-d, the Divine energy that is the world's very foundation becomes compromised, "sullied." and "weakened" to the point that it cannot effectively sustain the world. Thus, the world begins to shake. The stability of the world is guaranteed only so long as the foundation is an enduring one. When one perverts G-d's role and utilizes Him for falsehood, the very foundations of the world begin to falter.

Exile: a false world

The phenomenon of exile is more than just the time period when the Jewish people were driven off their land and subjected to millennia of persecution and suffering. Exile is when

G-d's energy is compromised. We don't see G-d's role in our lives as clearly as it was seen in the days of the Temple. People see inconsistencies in G-d's way of relating to the world. We see injustice and suffering and people question G-d.

If exile were only the lack of awareness of G-d's presence in our lives, that would be bad enough. Exile is much worse. G-d's "reputation" as it were is attacked. His integrity is challenged. This state is tantamount to the uttering of a false oath invoking the name of G-d. G-d, whose "seal is truth" is wrongly and ironically "implicated" in the very opposite trait of falsehood.

According to Abarbanel, this is the reason Maimonides considered the belief in Moshiach as one of the thirteen principles of faith. Without the Messianic Redemption that will reverse the sacrilege and scourge of exile, the very belief in G-d and His justice is compromised and the foundations of the world tremble.

Thus during the Messianic Age, when ultimate truth will prevail, the foundations of

the earth will therefore be strengthened, because at that time the entire world will be permeated with an acute awareness of the true nature of G-d's existence and the existence of G-dly truth.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

"I Am"

The focus of the Torah reading on Shavuos is on the so-called Ten Commandments [*Aseres Hadibros*], which are more accurately described as the "Ten Statements." In these Ten Statements, G-d "introduces" Himself by declaring:

> "I am the L-rd your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

The original Hebrew term G-d uses to introduce Himself in the *Aseres Hadibros* is "*Anochi*-I am." According to the Midrash, this word actually originated in the Egyptian language. It is remarkable that G-d would have chosen a word from a foreign language to reveal Himself to the Jewish people at Sinai.

Moreover, not only is it derived from a foreign language; it is Egyptian, the most morally depraved country in the world, as is stated in the Torah!

Why would G-d choose to have His opening word of the most important communication of history begin with an Egyptian word?

The Rebbe draws a fundamental lesson from this fact:

The Torah that G-d gave us at Sinai was intended to be used as a way of reaching every aspect of life. G-d is not restricted to one area. The same G-d who is situated in a holy place is responsible for - and therefore exists in - even the unholy, the foreign. It is our task to look for and discover the Divinity underlying all of G-d's creations.

"The L-rd"

The Hebrew name for G-d used here is the Tetragrammaton. This name, often referred to as G-d's "essential name," comprises three Hebrew words: *Haya, Hoveh, Yihyeh*, (was, is, will be).

The fact that these three tenses are consolidated in one word informs us that G-d transcends the limitations of time. He is simultaneously, in the past, in the present and in the future. At Sinai, the Jewish people were exposed to this transcendent manifestation of G-d.

"your G-d"

In Hebrew, the word "your" is different when addressing a group as opposed to an individual. Although G-d is addressing the entire Jewish nation for all times, He employed the singular form of the Hebrew suffix which denotes that He is speaking to only one person.

This is rather strange considering the fact that in all of history there was never a more collective experience than at Sinai. Yet, instead of underscoring the collective nature of this event, G-d chose to address each individual as if He was speaking to one person.

The lesson we are to learn from this is that, notwithstanding G-d's transcendence, He

nevertheless chose at Sinai - and continues to choose, to connect Himself to each and every one of us.

Moreover, the term "your G-d (Elokecha)" in this verse implies that G-d becomes our very power and inner force. From Sinai onward, G-d cannot be an abstraction for a Jew; He is an integral part of our lives.

The implication of this notion is that for a Jew, anything that he or she does cannot go against G-d by his or her nature. True, a Jew can sin but that it because we have free choice and we can go against our nature.

To illustrate, it is against human nature to jump off a roof, but yet a human being has the ability to do just that. This singular term changed our true nature forever. Our choice is whether we do life affirming things or things that go against our intrinsic nature.

"Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

The great philosopher and poet, R. Yehudah Halevi raised the question why the Torah did

not say, "who has created heaven and earth," a far greater accomplishment, one would think, than "merely" liberating the Jews from Egypt.

One of the answers to this question is that all of Judaism represents our ongoing effort at liberation. At whatever level we are in our spiritual development, we find ourselves stifled and confined. Every time we do a Mitzvah, our goal, is to "break out" of the land of *Mitzrayim*-Egypt, the Land of Confinement (the literal translation of the word).

Our task is to emulate G-d, by continually being involved in the process of liberation; liberating ourselves, and thereby, the entire world.

The Commandment to Believe in and Anticipate Moshiach

Indeed, of one the early codifiers of Jewish law, known as the SeMaK, stated that the first verse of the Aseres Hadibros constitutes the commandment to believe and anticipate

the future Messianic Redemption - the objective of all of our efforts now.

Why is the commandment to believe in Redemption included in the first Commandment?

It maybe suggested that it is G-d's way of responding to a question about the opening words of this commandment that "I am G-d, your G-d." As was explained above, this means that G-d has invested His very essence into us so that our nature is essentially G-dly.

This assertion raises a question:

Where do we see that G-d is our true identity when we are so materialistic?

The answer is provided in the continuation of the commandment: "Who has taken you out of the Land of Egypt." If one does not see how the essence of the Jew is G-dly it is due to the fact that we are still in exile. However, when G-d will liberate us from exile it will become clear to all that we are a G-dly people.

ESSAY FOURTEEN
DESERT STORM

ESSAY FOURTEEN
DESERT STORM

Location, Location, Location

History is replete with events of great significance. Of these, "Mattan Torah-The Giving of the Torah" stands out as its **most** significant event. Never before has the world experienced an event of such monumental importance. And never again will the world experience the revolutionary change it experienced at Mount Sinai.

Even the great revelations of the future Age of Redemption will not outdo the dramatic impact of Sinai. Indeed, the Messianic revelation will make that which occurred at Sinai on a temporary basis, endure forever.

Given in the Desert

The venue for this monumental event –

where "heaven and earth were united" – was Mount Sinai, which was situated in Midbar Sinai (The Sinai Desert).

No detail of the Torah is unimportant or trivial. Certainly, no event associated with the world's most significant revolution, can be devoid of meaning. The fact that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, situated in the Sinai desert is, likewise, central to the entire experience. It is therefore, noteworthy that the two Torah readings prior to Shavuos (the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai) this year are named, Behar (Bechukotai) -On the **Mountain,** and Bamidbar-In the Desert.

We must understand, why the giving of the Torah on a mountain and in a desert, is so central to the giving of the Torah.

A desert, the Midrash explains, is a no-man's-land. Nobody lays claim to a barren, desolate wasteland. It is – to use a legal term – *hefker,* free for all, to come and claim. No person can claim exclusive rights to the Torah. The Torah – like the desert – belongs to no one in particular. Everyone, thus, has a right to

make a claim for it.

One may raise an obvious objection to the "desert" metaphor. The Torah was not just something G-d left out in middle of nowhere for us to claim. The Torah was given to us as a gift. Furthermore, the Torah is also likened to an inheritance. Why then do we emphasize the fact that the Torah was given in a desert?

Two Dimensions of Torah

The answer lies in the realization that there are two distinct dimensions of Torah. There is an aspect of Torah that can be grasped and appreciated by the human mind. When we refer to the Torah as a gift, it is in the sense that it was placed within our intellectual reach. This aspect of Torah was indeed given to us.

There is, conversely, a higher dimension to Torah; one that is utterly beyond our mind's grasp. So transcendent does this aspect of Torah remain, that everyone can clearly see is its Divine character. And even this dimension of Torah, the A-mighty, enabled us to access.

There is a difference, however, in the manner that we access the higher dimension of Torah. In contrast to the part of Torah which was given to us – within the parameters of our intellectual faculties – and can therefore be grasped with our mind, the higher dimension of Torah is utterly beyond the realm of intellect. To connect in any way with the divinity of Torah, we must put aside our own understanding and be receptive to the G-dly energy within Torah. Through humility and total self-abnegation – the spiritual analogue of a "desert" – one can discover the transcendent element in Torah.

By transforming ourselves into a "desert," by totally negating our egos, G-d, in His infinite kindness, has enabled us to `pick up' even this transcendent aspect of Torah.

Moshiach and Humility

One of the qualities that Moshiach possesses is his humility. Like Moses, the first redeemer, who was known for his unparalleled humility, Moshiach too, despite his greatness and power, is utterly humble. Moshiach, like

Moses before him, take no credit for his actions. He is a transparent figure whose humility and self-abnegation allows G-d's power to run through him.

One of Moshiach's major responsibilities will be to reveal heretofore hidden dimensions of Torah. In order for him and us to be receptive to these mysteries we must become like the desert.

Thus, according to the Midrash, Moshiach introduces himself to the Jewish people by declaring: "**Humble ones**, the Time of your Redemption has arrived!"

Desert and Thirst for Knowledge

A desert is also a place that lacks water to quench our thirst. This has been employed as a metaphor to describe the spiritual state of impoverishment that characterizes our existence in exile.

How do we reconcile the metaphor that describes a desert as a symbol of humility and total receptivity to the most sublime aspects of Torah with the symbolism of a

desert as a place without any water, which symbolizes Torah?

One way of understanding the connection between the two interpretations is to refer to the Biblical prophecy that uses thirst and hunger in a positive vein. It is not for physical nourishment, but an insatiable thirst for spiritual enlightenment that will occasion the Messianic Era.

This thirst comes not from a lack of spiritual water, i.e., the knowledge of Torah. On the contrary, it comes from one's exposure to the infinite nature of Torah, in relation to which, no matter how much we learn and grasp, we will always thirst for more.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

PROUD HUMILITY

ESSAY FIFTEEN

PROUD HUMILITY

A Unique Mountain

Sinai is the name of a mountain. Not just any mountain, but the one G-d had selected for giving the Torah to the Jewish people. And it is this mountain that the Torah singles out for special distinction.

The popular Talmudic treatise, Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) begins with the words,

Moses received the Torah from Sinai."

Indeed, throughout Talmudic literature, Mount Sinai is highlighted as an unusual mountain.

Moreover, the Torah portion close to Shavuos (the anniversary of the giving of the Torah) is actually named "Behar" which means "on the mountain." After the introductory statement concerning G-d giving the Torha on Mount Sinai, the Torah follows with a

rather detailed description of the laws concerning the Sabbatical year in Israel.

From the manner in which the Torah emphasizes that these laws were given on Sinai, Rashi, the principle Bible commentator, concludes that all of the Torah's precepts, just like the laws of the Sabbatical year, were given, in vivid detail, on Mount Sinai.

Obviously, once the Torah was givien on this mountain, it assumed singular importance. The question is why G-d had chosen this mountain specifically? What was so unique about this mountain upon which G-d chose to give this most important message to the Jewish people and the entire world?

Low is High

The Midrash explains that Sinai was the lowest of all the mountains in the region. This teaches us the value of humility and how it is indispensable for the study of Torah.

A question can be raised: To teach us humility, it would have sufficed for G-d to have transmitted the commandment in its

most general form. Why did He have to impart all the details, as well, on the same mountain? Couldn't He have waited to teach Moses all the details?

The Angel is in the Details

The answer lies in the way we approach the Torah and its multifaceted commandments.

An arrogant person feels uncomfortable about accepting any law that denies this individual his/her freedom to do whatever s/he pleases. It takes a measure of humility to accept someone else's authority.

There is yet another type of individual, who can accept a Mitzvah, even though it entails acceding to someone else's will, provided that he or she can tailor the mitzvah to his or her own liking. When one does so, the effect is that it is no longer the same mitzvah, but has become the individual's own preference. Thus, even the egotist – the antithesis of Sinai – can accept a Mitzvah, provide he or she can perform the mitzvah the way he or she likes to perform it.

The Torah, therefore, underscores in this pre-Shavuos parsha of Behar that even the most minute details of a commandment must come from G-d. When it comes to a mitzvah we have no right to dictate the terms of the mitzvah. All of it comes from G-d's revelation on Mount Sinai.

And only the truly humble people can accept the fact that they are required to engage in a lifestyle that conforms to a higher will – in all of its details.

Hills and Valleys

There is still one more question that can be asked. If G-d chose Mount Sinai to impress upon us the importance of humility in accepting the Torah, He should have given it in a valley?

The answer to this question is that, paradoxically, Judaism demands both total surrender of our egos to G-d in the acceptance of every facet of every Mitzvah as well as expressing that very ego in the performance of a Mitzvah. Even as we feel our own insignificance in relation to G-d, He

wants us to invest our feelings and our understanding in His commandments. G-d wants the Mitzvah to permeate, and resonate within, our entire being.

The mountain symbolizes the stature of every person which –humility notwithstanding – should not be shunned. Rather, we humbly accept the Torah within the confines of our personalities; not – G-d forbid – by altering the Torah to suit our tastes, but by making the Torah so affect us, that we can identify with it. Our tastes, preferences and personalities become inseparable from that of the Torah.

Free to be Humble and Expressive

To be truly humble one must have an awareness of G-d, in relation to whom, one recognizes one's own frailties and limitations. Tragically, ever since the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash (The Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, the Divine presence has been utterly concealed. Genuine humility is a hard thing to come by

Similarly, the capacity to shape and mold our personalities to conform to that of the Torah has been severely compromised. To accomplish that, we must be in control of our faculties and be able to express them freely. Once more, the tragedy of exile has clouded our ability to be expressive of who we are and what are our true feelings.

The Messianic Age, ushered in by Moshiach, Is not only a time when freedom and peace will prevail. It will also introduce to the world a clear awareness of G-d. Moreover, we will have removed the blockages that do not allow us to freely express our inner feelings. Our ability to shape our personalities in the Torah's mold will be unhampered.

Every Shavuos, when we read of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, we get a taste of these freedoms, to whet our appetite for the real and permanent thing.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

ESSAY SIXTEEN

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

Two Tablets

Honor your father and mother, the fifth of the Ten Commandments (or, more precisely, the "Ten Statements") appears in this week's parsha, and is a pillar of most civilized societies.

That this commandment is central to Judaism is evident from its inclusion in the Ten Commandments. There is, however, a question that has been raised by Bible commentators regarding its "position" within those Ten Commandments.

There is a well-known tradition that the reason the Ten Commandments were divided into two tablets, five commandments on the one tablet and the other five on the other, was to reflect the two thrusts of obligations we have.

]On the first tablet, the obligations between man and G-d were delineated, while the second tablet details our obligations towards our fellow human being.

Equipped with this premise, commentators wonder why the commandment to honor one's father and mother was included in the **first** tablet? Aren't parents human? And isn't our obligation to honor them an obligation that should have been included in the category of "man to man" precepts?

The standard answer given by commentators is that, by extension, honoring our parents **is** a form of honoring G-d. In the words of the Talmud, "G-d equated the honor due to parents to the honor due to G-d." To dramatize this notion, the Talmud relates how a certain sage upon hearing his mother's footsteps, would remark, "The Shechinah (Divine presence) is coming!"

But this answer only begs a follow-up question. Why did the Torah equate the honor of mere mortals to the honor of G-d?

Body and Soul

To answer this question, we need to preface an understanding of the human condition.

Human beings are unique creations. While every creature consists of both a body and a soul, there is a fundamental difference between the relationship of a human body to its soul and that of all other creatures.

All living beings were created with bodies that were suffused with souls. The body of an animal, for example, is therefore inseparable from its soul. There is no conflict between the two. What this means is that the soul of an animal is so limited that it "fits" neatly in its body, without any resistance.

The human being's body however, was created **before** G-d infused it with a soul. The body does not readily embrace the soul. The body and soul can therefore appear to exist independently. Although the body could not survive without its soul, the body could easily be unaware of its source of life. Likewise, the soul can exist within the body without making an effort to "strike up a dialogue" with the body, leaving the body unaffected.

Obedience vs. Honor

Because of this dichotomous relationship, a body may have a hard time attaining the level of respect and honor for G-d. For the body to perform a Mitzvah would be easier, because even a materialistic body recognizes the need to do things that go against the body's instincts. The body can also be made to understand the need and benefit to submit to a discipline.

When we deal with the concept of honor, it is quite a different story. How does a body, with its limited appreciation for anything that is beyond the physical realm, develop an appreciation for anything spiritual and abstract? How does a body begin to approach honoring G-d?

Vicarious Honor

To bridge this gap, between a physical human body and the awareness of a G-d whom we must honor, G-d gave us parents. Parents, who choose to get married, bear and raise children, act vicariously as G-d's agents

and partners in the creation and the shaping and molding of new life.

By honoring parents we thus develop an appreciation for those who are responsible for our existence. In doing so, we are compelled to look deeper into our existence and come ultimately to the realization that we did not just happen. There must be a Creator who created us and our parents, and Who is responsible for everything in our lives. The very institution of parenthood is G-d's way of introducing Himself to us.

It now becomes clear as to why honoring parents was included in the first tablet that focuses on our obligation to G-d.

Why Two Parents?

All of this begs a further question. If the institution of parenthood was to introduce us to our Divine Parent, why did G-d create a natural order that requires **two** parents? Wouldn't the unity of G-d demand that there be only one proxy of G-d?

Duality is the symbol of nature which is punctuated by division and fragmentation. This is why the creation of the world featured in Genesis begins with the letter Beis (two), whereas the Ten Statements begin with the letter Aleph (one).

One G-d: Two Manifestations

In truth, while there is only one G-d, there are two ways in which He manifests Himself. G-d can either act towards us as a mother, with warmth, closeness and a spirit of nurturing. G-d, alternatively, can relate to us as a Father, who does not show His emotions, who maintains some distance from the child.

This parallels the biological process where the mother's contribution to reproduction differs markedly from that of the father. The mother and father metaphor in relation to G-d likewise reflects G-d's intimate involvement in our lives, and His detachment from our lives, respectively.

The "father" and "mother" modes of G-dly expression, parallel the way G-d related to us in the days when the Temple stood as

compared to the way He relates to us in the present state of exile.

In the present, G-d conceals His love and appears aloof and detached from His people. Nevertheless, we are duty bound to develop a sense of honor and respect for Him. But, at the same time, we must also express our desire to see the other side of G-d's relationship. We must constantly pray to G-d to bring about the coming of Moshiach who will usher in an Age where G-d's presence will be revealed, and take us into "Her" motherly embrace.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PLEASE, FORCE ME!

Genealogy and Torah

The Holiday of Shavuos, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, is preceded by the Torah portion, Bamidbar. According to the 17th century authority known as the Shaloh, all Holidays are connected thematically to the Torah portion read in close proximity to the Holiday.

Bamidbar commences with G-d's commandment to Moses to count the Jewish nation.

> Take the sum of the entire congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses...

The Midrash relates that when G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai,

the nations of the world lodged a complaint to G-d as to why they were deprived of this great gift. G-d's response to them was that the Jewish people were able to trace their genealogy as evidenced by the way they were counted "by their families and their father's houses." They were therefore entitled to receive the Torah.

What exactly is it about our genealogy that made us worthy of receiving the Torah?

Complain of the Nations

To answer this question the nineteenth century sage, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, cites a passage of the Talmud where a parallel "complaint" the nations of the world addressed to G-d is discussed: The nations of the world, the Talmud states, argued that it was not fair that G-d coerced the Jewish people to accept the Torah. According to the Talmud, G-d placed the mountain over the heads of the Jewish people and declared: "Either you accept the Torah or you will all be buried underneath this mountain." The

nations protested, "Why did you not compel us to accept the Torah."

The underlying logic of their argument was that if the Jews voluntarily accepted the Torah that would have given them the edge over the nations who did not accept the Torah voluntarily. But if the Jews were coerced into accepting the Torah why would the other nations be deprived of that same experience?

The Anatomy of Coercion

To understand why indeed did G-d force the Jews to accept the Torah and not the other nations, we must first address a more fundamental question: Of what value is the Torah if we had to be forced to accept it?

One explanation is that forcing someone to do something has value only in two circumstances:

First, in the case of a child or otherwise immature individual it may make sense to use some measure of pressure to get that child to do something good when one can assume

that eventually—with proper guidance and support—the child will grasp the value of that coerced behavior and do it willingly. We may force a child to clean his room with the understanding that a time will come that the child will appreciate the value of having a tidy room on his or her own.

Second, one may use some measure of force when we know that deep down the person has a core belief in the value of that behavior, but where external circumstances might have clouded the person's thoughts so that they will resist doing that which they themselves know is right. Usually, these core values are ingrained in a person due to the close relationship they have with their parents and grandparents. This family tradition will ultimately instill their values in the hearts and minds of their children. And although they might stray from that path, some minimal pressure can allow them to express the feelings they already have in them.

With respect to the Jewish people both conditions prevailed. G-d knew that right after the Exodus from Egypt the Jewish people were in a state of spiritual infancy.

They were not ready to express their feelings of acceptance of the Torah; they therefore had to be prodded along. G-d however knew that when they would eventually mature they would be ecstatic that they were given the Torah.

In addition, the second scenario also certainly applied. They had a family tradition going back to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish people that programmed them with a sense of devotion to G-d and His teachings. And notwithstanding the fact that their experience in Egypt obscured these feelings, the pressure G-d put on them to accept the Torah sufficed to awaken the love they had for it, that they inherited from their fathers and mothers.

In fact, it is the second scenario that ensured that G-d knew that they would eventually come to appreciate their forced acceptance of the Torah.

This then is the meaning of the Midrash that G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people because they had a strong family tradition that enabled them to accept the Torah. It

inculcated within them a fierce determination that come what may they will never abandon the Torah.

The Role of the Convert

Of course, a convert to Judaism, who is prepared to accept all of Judaism's dictates, is accepted as a full member of the Jewish community. In one important respect, the convert is superior to one who is born Jewish.

The Jew, for better or worse, is the beneficiary of generations of tradition that traces back to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. The convert's connection to Judaism is entirely voluntary. There is no family tradition and no Mount Sinai hovering over his or her head that compels him or her to embrace Judaism. It is the most free, independent and volitional commitment. In Maimonides words to a convert who experienced discrimination, "While we trace ourselves back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you have a direct link to the Creator."

The Prototype

The revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai is the prototype of the permanent revelation of G-d in the Messianic Age. One difference between these two events is that whereas we had to be coerced into accepting the Torah to reveal our inner desire for it, our acceptance of Moshiach and the Messianic Age should be and will be without the slightest reservation—with great joy and sincerity.

All the hidden attachments we have to G-d that may not show up on the surface will no longer remain hidden. In the Messianic Age our inside and outside personas will be totally at peace with all the teachings of the Torah.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

IMMEDIATELY, IF NOT SOONER!

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

IMMEDIATELY, IF NOT SOONER!

Three Anniversaries

The Holiday of Shavuos is first and foremost the anniversary of the day in which the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. Every Shavuos we not only **commemorate** this momentous event; we relive it, because, in truth, the revelation at Sinai occurs over and over again each year on Shavuos—especially when we read the Ten Commandments.

Shavuos is also the anniversary of the passing of King David, who was born and died on the same day—seventy years apart.

The third major historical event to have occurred on Shavuos is the passing of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, exactly 250 years ago.

The three protagonists of this day are therefore Moses, David and Rabbi Yisrael

Ba'al Shem Tov. The initials of these three names—**M**oses, **Y**israel, **D**avid—forms the Hebrew word. *miyad*, which means "immediately."

What do these three personalities/events have to do with the idea of immediacy?

Removal of Barriers

One suggestion perhaps is that the ideal that all three had in common was the removal of the forces that prevent us from realizing our G-d given goals. The impediments to achieving our objectives that prolong our agony can be removed by the collective energy of these three leaders and their ideals.

All three personified the most central ideals and focuses of Judaism, albeit in different ways: Moses through the commandments; David through his prayers and the Ba'al Shem Tov through touching and revealing the inner soul of Judaism.

Before Moses time, the spiritual realms were blocked from entering in the parameters of the physical world. As the Midrash puts it,

there existed a "decree" or dichotomy between the upper spheres and the lower spheres. The revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai and the subsequent communication of the Torah to the Jewish people through Moses, who acted as the conduit to bring the Torah down to us, removed that dichotomy. When we do a Mitzvah that involves a physical act; that object and the person who performs the Mitzvah become holy. The Mitzvah act connects the person and the object with which the Mitzvah was performed to G-d. Indeed, one of the translations of the word Mitzvah is "connection."

Prayer—especially as it was revealed through King David and expressed so poignantly in his Psalms—represents the removal of the barriers between our needs and wants and G-d's "consciousness." Through prayer, G-d—by His own choice and volition, of course—"pays attention" to our needs. Moreover our needs and wants, through prayer, can become His "needs" and "wants." Of course, G-d has no inherent needs; but He chose to make our needs and wants His needs and wants. It is prayer that bridges the gap between the two.

The Ba'al Shem Tov removed the barrier between the inner soul of the Jew and his outer persona. The Ba'al Shem Tov revealed the exquisite beauty in even—nay, especially—the simplest Jew. No longer did we have to dig endlessly to find the inner treasures beneath the surface of every Jew; the Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings facilitated that. The Ba'al Shem Tov's teachings also helped to expose the Divine in nature and reveal the inner dimension of G-d and His Torah.

The Three Prongs

It is therefore no wonder that the term *miyad*-immediately is used in conjunction with the coming of Moshiach as Maimonides writes: "Israel returns to G-d and they are redeemed *miyad*-immediately."

In these words, Maimonides alludes to the three pronged approach to removing the last barrier that separates between us and the Messianic Age.

First and foremost, the smooth and unobstructed transition from exile to

redemption is brought about by the study of Torah that is associated with Moses. Torah is the medium that changes our conscious mindset. It helps us to think, speak and behave in a liberated fashion.

Second, the power of prayer, where we come to G-d and "demand" that He bring an end to exile—as King David did plead and demand of G-d to fulfill his requests on behalf of the Jewish people—has the power to remove the obstacles that G-d may have imposed because He is waiting for us to ask for it.

And last, but not least, the study of the Ba'al Shem Tovs' Chassidic teachings—as they have been expounded upon in the myriad of Chassidic works written by his successors, particularly, the over 200 volumes authored by the Lubavitcher Rebbe—we can touch the unconscious precincts of our soul and reveal its core and essence, referred to as the "Moshiach" spark of our soul.

The Ba'al Shem Tov is the one who revealed the inner light of Torah and of the Jewish soul. And this year his contribution of light assumes even greater significance inasmuch

as this is the 250th anniversary of his passing. In Hebrew the number 250 is represented by the word *ner*-which means candle. Through his teachings we are able to reveal that light.

When we unleash the three pronged "assault" on exile in all of its manifestations, it facilitates the immediate, unhindered, unequivocal, unqualified, unmitigated and irreversible process of the Messianic Age. Because when we harness the three forces represented by Moses, David and the Ba'al Shem Tov, we remove: a) the conscious resistance to Redemption, b) the G-dly imposed resistance to Redemption and c) the suppression of the subconscious Messianic core. May we see this happen immediately-*miyad!*

And may we all receive the Torah this Shavuos with joy and profound inner inspiration!

ESSAY NINETEEN

ENVY, LUST AND GLORY

ESSAY NINETEEN

ENVY, LUST AND GLORY

Perennial Preparations

Torah is the greatest gift given to humankind. It was a hidden treasure that was finally revealed to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai 3300 plus years ago

Before we can receive this gift we must make preparations.

Indeed, all of Judaism involves preparations. We have a full month before the onset of the New Year, the month of Elul, to prepare for the New Year. All of childhood is a preparation for adulthood. Courting and engagement is the preparation for marriage. For thousands of years the world has been preparing for the ultimate Redemption.

It follows then that the world's most momentous event—the giving of the Torah

at Mount Sinai—called for intense preparation on the part of the Jewish people.

In truth, the preparation started at the beginning of Creation. Our Sages tell us that from the beginning of time, the world was waiting with bated breath for the time the Jewish people would accept the Torah.

The preparation assumed more clarity and direction with the introduction of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs onto the world scene. Abraham's circumcision and his other virtues and practices placed the world—and specifically his descendants on the inexorable road to Sinai. This journey towards Sinai was further advanced by each successive generation—a total of seven—until Moses' generation.

The entire Egyptian Bondage was intended as a preparation for Sinai. It was the great smelting pot that forged a nation out of a family and put them in place to receive the Torah.

The forty nine days from the Exodus to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was one more intense period of refinement and

preparation for the day that G-d would forever cast His lot with the Jewish people—and, by extension—with all of humanity.

But even this marked only the penultimate stage of preparation. The last period of preparation took place in the five days prior to the giving of the Torah. In these five days, a series of communications took place between G-d, Moses and the Jewish people that involved the proper means of preparing for the epiphany at Sinai.

Three Forms of Preparation

Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes evident that even this last period was divided into three forms of preparation: The first was their encampment at Mount Sinai. The second was the requirement to separate from their spouses, and the third was their need to know their boundaries in terms of where they could situate themselves in the vicinity of the Mountain.

According to the *Chiddushi Harim*—the first leader of the Ger Chassidic movement—there are three negative traits that get in the way

of our ability to receive the Torah: These traits are envy, lust and the pursuit of honor. In Ethics of the Fathers that we study before Shavuos it is stated that these three vices can "take a person out of the world"; they undermine a person's very existence.

From the Torah's description of what transpired in the days leading up to the giving of the Torah we see how these three vices were dealt with. And as we shall see, the three forms of preparation mentioned earlier parallel the three vices that must be dealt with as a prerequisite to Mattan Torah.

Countering Envy with Unity

As mentioned, on the first day of the month of Sivan, the Torah tells us, the entire Jewish nation encamped opposite Mount Sinai. The Torah employs the singular word *vayichan* to describe their encampment, although it speaks of the entire nation. This is to teach us that at that encampment all of the Jewish people were so united that "they were like one person with one heart."

Although there are many forms of and rationalizations for hatred of another, the most potent form of hatred—and therefore also the most difficult form to deal with—is hatred that derives from jealousy.

To counter hatred based on reason—such as that person harmed me—one can use reason. One can find rational arguments that could prove that the other is not really your enemy. However, when the hatred is based simply on the other person's existence, one must look for a much more fundamental argument to dispel that hatred.

The argument that counters hatred that derives from jealousy is the idea that all of our souls are related that was dramatized by their encampment at Mount Sinai as one people with one heart. This represented the ideal of unity that uproots the vice of envy. Envy—and the hatred that it generates—derives from a lack of understanding of the essential unity and bond that exists between all of our souls. At their root, all of our souls drive from the same Divine source.

Countering Lust

With this revelation at Mount Sinai the first vice of envy was disposed.

The second vice of lust was dealt with in the next few days. As mentioned, on the second day of their encampment at Mount Sinai, the people were told that for three days prior to the giving of the Torah they were to cease being intimate with their spouses. This separation was designed to help them curb the powerful forces of lust and desire that can lead to a person's destruction and seriously undermines one's ability to receive the Torah.

To be sure intimacy in the context of marriage is not only permissible but desirable and holy. But in order to prevent excesses in this arena that would serve as a major impediment to their ability to embrace the Torah, they had to desist from even the permissible and even desirable intimacy.

Countering Pursuit of Glory

And finally, they were also told that for the duration of the giving of the Torah, on Mount Sinai, boundaries will be set up. Each person should not leave the area designated for him or her. No one—except for Moses—was to go onto the mountain. Setting boundaries was intended as a means to counteract the obsession people have with the pursuit of power and glory. When a person appreciates his or her place in life, they will not seek the glory that goes along with positions in life that are not intended for them.

It is true that our Sages tell us that every person can and should say: "When will my deeds approach the deeds of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?" However, this does not mean that we can all be on their level and occupy their privileged position in the hierarchy of the Jewish people. What it does say is that our actions can match the **actions** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not their spiritual level.

When we recognize our essential unity, curb our insatiable appetite for material and physical pleasure and recognize our place and role in this world, we will fully appreciate and be receptive to the teachings of the Torah.

Reenactment for Future

Our Sages also tell us that the giving of the Torah was the paradigm for the future Messianic Age. It thus follows that to be receptive to the G-dly revelations of the Messianic Age we must work on the three abovementioned traits:

Unity that derives from an understanding of our common spiritual source. To counter the effects of exile that were engendered by the senseless hatred that prevailed at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, we must exhibit senseless love towards our fellow Jew. This senseless or supra-rational love derives from the sense of our inherent unity.

Curbing of our obsession with materialism, recognizing that the material world exists so

that we elevate it and use it as a vehicle to better serve G-d.

Understanding of our place in the scheme of creation. Our generation has to realize its paradoxical status. On the one hand it is at the bottom of the hierarchy of generations as it pertains to our spiritual perception. On the other hand, we must realize that our generation—with all of its spiritual limitations—is the generation that will finish the task and bring Moshiach. Even our most simple gestures of goodness and adherence to the Mitzvos will yield extremely powerful results. One deed can transform the entire world.

It is therefore crucial that we don't overemphasize our importance, but to humbly accept the teachings and inspiration of our forebears. But, simultaneously, we must know that we are a unique generation that will have the singular distinction of being the one that will bring about the Redemption.

Indeed, when Maimonides concludes his Magnum Opus—the Mishneh Torah—his

description of the Messianic Age reflects the three foregoing traits:

> "The sages and prophets did not yearn for the Messianic era in order to have dominion over the entire world, to rule over the gentiles, to be exalted by the nations [read: they will not seek honor and glory] or to eat, drink and celebrate [read: pursuit of worldly pleasures].
>
> Rather they desired to be free for the study of Torah and wisdom without any pressures or disturbances...
>
> In that era, there will be no famine or war, envy or rivalry [read: true unity], for good will flow in abundance and all delights will be as common as dust [read: although there will be an abundance of delights we will not be attracted to them; they will not have value beyond that of dust].
>
> The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. Therefore, Israel will be great sages and know hidden matters, attaining knowledge of

their Creator to the full extent of human potential, as Isaiah states: "The world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea fills the ocean bed.

ESSAY TWENTY
THE RELENTLESS SINAI EXPERIENCE

ESSAY TWENTY

THE RELENTLESS SINAI EXPERIENCE

The Paradox

The upcoming holiday of Shavuos (of the year 5777-2017) marks the 3,329th anniversary of Mattan Torah-the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

There is a paradoxical aspect to the giving of the Torah.

On the one hand, history's most momentous event was a one-time occurrence. It will never be repeated.

On the other hand, our Sages tell us that the Sinai experience is a constant ongoing one. This is reflected in the text of the blessing we recite every morning: "Blessed are you, G-d, who **gives** us the Torah." If the giving of the Torah was a one-time event, the text of the blessing should have read: "Who **gave** us the Torah." The use of the present-tense "who

gives us the Torah" suggests that it is an ongoing process.

How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction?

One answer to this question can be gleaned from the prophetic reading of this Shabbos—the Haftarah.

Angels Never Return?

Samson's parents are visited by an angel who gives them instructions as to how they should raise Samson, their son to be. When Manoach, Samson's father, sees that the angel did not return he was then convinced that it was indeed an angel.

The question is asked, how does the fact that the angel disappeared, never to return, prove that it was an angel?

One answer is based on the different dynamics of the power of good versus the power of evil.

When we are confronted by the forces of evil, we feel a relentless push in that direction. The temptation to do the wrong thing does

not leave after its first attempt fails. It returns with even more vengeance until it succeeds in getting us to succumb or is totally defeated.

Conversely, when we are inspired to do good, the inspiration rarely returns the same way it came initially. If we do not seize upon the opportunity to translate the inspiration into action, it will most likely fizzle out.

Joseph's Resistance Unrelenting Attempts

The story of Joseph and how he resisted the attempts of Potiphar's wife to seduce him is cited to illustrate the point.

The Torah describes Potiphar's relentless attempts to entice Joseph. Our Sages tell us that she argued that their relationship was ordained by G-d and was therefore not sinful. She claimed that her intentions were "for the sake of Heaven." How did Joseph know that it was not a holy desire?

His proof was the unrelenting manner in which she tried to get him. Joseph reasoned,

if her attempts came from a holy source she would not have been so persistent.

Free Choice

One reason for this difference lies in the concept of free choice. For our choices to be meaningful there has to be a balance between good and evil. If the forces of good would be in our face and so enticing as evil it would not be much of a challenge for us to do good. And if evil was elusive it would not be much of an accomplishment to negate it. Thus evil is in our face while good stays in the background, waiting for us to discover it, reveal it and claim it. And when we do it is eminently ours.

The difference between good and evil can be summed up as follows: Evil seeks to embrace us, while good waits for us to embrace it. Evil requires very little thought and effort, while to do good demands much energy.

Our Sages summed up this distinction when they said: "One who comes to become purified will be assisted, one who comes to be contaminated; the trap doors will be

opened for him." In other words, G-d will certainly assist the person who seeks to take the initiative to do good; but it must be **their** initiative.

Conversely, one who seeks to pursue evil needs no assistance; they just fall through the opening that leads them to evil. The doors are open and one need not exert himself to go in that direction.

This explains why Manoach knew that the message concerning their future son Samson came from an angel; a holy source. If the messenger was from an unholy source it would have returned many times; it would have been unrelenting in bringing its unholy message to them. Now that the angel did not return, he realized that it was G-d's angel that was delivering the message, and it was up to him to implement it.

The above distinction between good and evil can also shed light on the paradoxical nature of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Since it was the ultimate holy experience it only comes once and it is up to us to embrace the experience of Sinai. If we would witness the

epiphany of Sinai repeatedly there would be no room for choosing anything but the Torah from Sinai.

Probing Deeper

However the abovementioned distinction between good and evil is only true when we view them on the surface. Good is elusive and sporadic while evil is ubiquitous and relentless. But if we probe deeper into the inner dimension of the soul we will discover that, on the contrary, the forces of holiness are indeed pervasive and relentless in another way.

Evil can be seen as persistent whereas the forces of goodness are sporadic at best is true only in the way good and evil present themselves overtly. Deep down the situation is truly reversed. Evil is a foreign substance that our souls naturally reject. For evil to get into our system it must come through the use of superficial gimmicks, enticements and repeated efforts until it ensnares us.

The forces of goodness and holiness, by contrast, strike a responsive chord within our

souls and resonate within. Moreover, the generation of positive energy acts like a seed planted in fertile earth. It becomes an integral part of who we are, but it takes much cultivation for the seeds to sprout, blossom and bear fruit.

Thus, when the Torah was given at Sinai to all the souls of all the Jewish people from that time until eternity, our souls were imprinted with the Divine message permanently. We just have to listen to the stirrings of our souls and we will hear the voice of G-d forever declaring to us and through us: "I am the G-d your G-d who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of Bondage..."

Paradox Explained

Thus the paradox is explained. The experience of Sinai was overtly a one-time one, even as its message resonates within each and every Jewish soul, especially during the Festival of Shavuos. During this most auspicious – and arguably the most auspicious – holiday, it becomes so much easier for us to hear the sound of Sinai from within, particularly when

the Torah reading of the giving of the Torah at Sinai takes place.

But even then, our ability to hear and feel the Sinai experience that is embedded in our souls may be compromised because we are in exile, a period of concealment and obstruction. Exile forces seek to muffle any and all messages that emanate from the soul necessitating even more effort on our part to let the soul express itself.

This will all change soon, with the imminent arrival of Moshiach, who will usher in the age when all of what transpired at Sinai will gush forth from all of our souls, and the Sinai experience will then be an overt and permanent one.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

TREES AND FRUITS AND MOSES MEETS MOSHIACH

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

TREES AND FRUITS AND MOSES MEETS MOSHIACH

Trees Judged on Shavuos

In many Jewish communities there is a custom to decorate the synagogues with branches and leaves of trees. One of the reasons for this practice is the fact that our Sages tell us that G-d judges the fruits of the trees on Shavuos.

A question has been raised: On Shavuos the fruits are judged. Why then do we not have custom to eat fruit on Shavuos as we do on the Fifteenth of Shevat (known colloquially as Tu Bishvat), the New Year for Trees?

And, conversely, the question has been raised, why do we have a custom to eat fruits on the 15th of Shevat? If that day is the New Year for trees, why don't we decorate our homes and synagogues with tree branches?

There is a beautiful answer given to this question:

Judging the Tree or the Fruits

A person is likened to a tree. Our children are our fruits. There are times when we come before G-d and say to Him: "when you judge me, and you realize that I am not that strong of a tree, please bear in mind the beautiful fruits I have borne. My children are so special that I, the tree, deserve to be (and am) blessed as well.

However, the situation may be reversed. Occasionally, the fruits may leave something to be desired, but the tree remains strong and reliable. We may feel our own inadequacies, but we can always come before G-d and proudly say how we had wonderful parents and grandparents.

Thus on the day (15th of Shevat) when we focus on the trees, we eat fruit, as our way of pleading our own case before G-d: preserve the tree because of the fruits. And on the day (Shavuos) when the focus is on the fruit, we decorate the synagogues with tree branches

as our way of pleading to G-d to preserve the fruits because of the trees.

Twin Message

In truth Shavuos combines both messages: Shavuos highlights the role of the children (the "fruits") in the giving of the Torah at Sinai: The Midrash relates that when G-d was about to give the Torah to the Jewish people, He asked for guarantors. They offered their ancestors and their prophets, but G-d did not accept them as credible guarantors that the Torah would always be preserved. Only when they offered their children (their "fruits") did G-d consent to give them the Torah.

And yet, Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers that we study in preparation for Shavuos) begins with the statement: Moses received the Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua etc." We must remember that the Torah we have came to us from our fathers, who in turn received it from their fathers, going all the way back to Moses, who received it from G-d at Sinai.

Judaism is a religion that is based on this duality. On the one hand, we look back to the earlier generations for guidance and inspiration. Each generation that is closer in time to the event of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai contains more of the "lightening" and "thunder" of that experience.

And as we travel farther away from Sinai some of that original energy may be lost. We thus always focus on the study of Talmud and other classical works of Torah, which will never become obsolete or old, because they capture the Torah's Divine light. Through the study of these classical works of Torah we can hear the echo of Sinai.

Advantage of the Youth

On the other hand, as we approach the Messianic Age, at which time the essence of the Divine light will be manifest, there is an advantage to the youngest generation. They are the closest to the unprecedented energy that will be generated; a force that will break down all the barriers and obstacles that

presently exist. Our youth is more in touch with this energy and therefore exhibits a greater propensity for rebelliousness, attempting to break down the established structures.

Finding the Balance

Obviously, this can be a double-edged sword. Our challenge thus is to create a balance between the consistent and eternal traditions of our forebears and the vibrant and explosive energy of our youth.

In simple terms this means that we must never forsake the teachings of Torah and the observance of its Mitzvos. Every day of our lives we remember the Revelation at Sinai and attempt to incorporate that memory in all that we do. This is represented by the image of the fruit recognizing that it comes from a sturdy tree.

But, simultaneously, we must recognize that while the fruit cannot grow in a vacuum, but must come from a tree, the ultimate goal of that tree is to produce fruits for the future. We must appreciate the superior spirituality

of our children and allow them to infuse their Messianic Age energies into the ancient and eternal teachings of the Torah.

This is where Moses meets Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE TEN DECLARATIONS THAT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

THE TEN DECLARATIONS THAT WILL CHANGE THE WORLD

Commandments or Declarations?

The Ten Commandments are actually referred to in the Torah as "Eseres Hadevarim, the Ten Statements," because they are not just commandments; they are declarative statements!

A declarative statement, in contrast with a commandment, is a statement of fact; "this is the way it is," as opposed to a commandment which expresses a desire on the part of the Commander that this is the way He would like it to be. And, indeed, this is the way the world will look like in the future Age of Redemption, when G-d's plan will finally be realized.

Hence, we may take the liberty, to retranslate the Ten Statements in ways that they will

reflect that future reality and the state of humanity then:

True Freedom

1. "My very Essence and transcendence will permeate your consciousness; which will liberate you from all constraints and forms of bondage.

In this first declaration G-d informs us how, in the ultimate age of enlightenment, we will experience true freedom because our entire being will be suffused with G-d's Essence.

No Other Controlling Influences

2. You will have no other controlling influences in your life because you will all be in My presence.

In the Messianic Age, there will be no false g-ds or other powers or influences in the world. While Moshiach will be our king and leader, it will be manifestly clear that he is "simply" channeling G-d's power to the world. It goes without saying that we will no longer worship money, fame, influence and power.

We will be liberated from these debilitating obsessions.

No Compromise

3. "You will no longer compromise the name of G-d, your G-d.

In the present, when we refer to G-d by name it does not capture His true Essence. Because of Galus-exile conditions we may not pronounce G-d's ineffable name. Instead we use an alternate name which describes G-d in His mode of Master rather than His transcendent Essence. In the Messianic Age, the prophet predicts "G-d will be one and His name will be one." The Talmud explains that this means we will no longer have to modify and thereby compromise G-d's name.

In the present day and age we tend to "bifurcate" G-d. There is the elusive, transcendent aspect of G-d associated with His ineffable name, and there is the aspect of G-d which is involved in our world and in our lives. To be in our world, G-d has to contract and obscure His true identity. In the Messianic Age, there will be no need for that

"bifurcation." We will be able to see that the transcendent G-d and the contracted, involved G-d are one and the same. Our G-d will no longer require a compromised name.

No Need for Reminders

4. "You will be fully aware of the Sabbath's illuminating power, and experience its other-worldliness.

Today our lives are marked with forgetfulness when it comes to spiritual matters. While we instinctively get out of bed and go through the daily rituals of getting dressed, etc., without much thought, spiritual matters demand special attention.

We have to be commanded to remember those things that ought to be an integral part of our lives at all times.

The Messianic Age will be completely different. It is referred to as the ultimate Sabbatical Age. We will enjoy eternal rest and tranquility and bask in G-d's utter sublimity. We will not need to be reminded of our spiritual nature and of G-d's presence.

External and Internal Parents

5. "You will appreciate your father and mother as well as the intellectual faculties of *chochma* and *binah* they represent."

In today's world, there is (and, and in truth, throughout history there has been) a much commented on generation gap. Our parents are the bridge between G-d's authority and us. Resistance to G-d's authority and the lack of appreciation for parents, which is natural in pre-Messianic times particularly in exile, is what creates the schism between children and their parents and ultimately leads to societal breakdown.

The breakdown of authority can further be traced to the failure to use our soul's intellectual powers of *chochma* and *binah*, which are referred to as the father and mother of our emotions. *Chochma* is the ability to conceptualize and *binah* is the ability to develop and flesh out an idea. When our internal father and mother are respected and valued we can control our emotions.

In the Messianic Age, we will fully appreciate the role of our earthly parents. There will no

longer be an external generation gap because there will no longer be an internal generation gap between our *chochma-binah* and our emotions.

This list concludes the First Tablet, which focuses on our relationship with G-d. We now proceed to the Second Tablet which highlights the way we will relate to other people and retranslate the next five statements to conform to the reality that will become the norm in the imminent Age of Redemption.

Divine Imprimatur

6. "You will not deny the image of G-d imprinted on every human being."

Today, we can cause harm to others—even, G-d forbid, murdering them. Before an evil person can cause harm to another, he must first devalue the other and deny the other's humanity, which the Torah defines as created in the image of G-d.

In the Messianic Age, however, we will no longer see a human being without also seeing

his or her Divinity. We will fully value each other and recognize that our faults do not define us.

In today's distorted world, when a person does something wrong people commonly say "well, he's only human." That is a misnomer. When a person commits a crime we should say, "that's the animal soul within his humanity," and only when someone is doing something right say "he is human!" G-d's image, which defines humanity, expresses itself through each person's goodness and righteousness.

In the Messianic Age, our Animal Souls will be fully tamed and refined. There will be nothing clouding our Divine images and therefore nobody will do anything to disrespect another.

No Pendulum Swings

7. "You will no longer be capable of dividing your loyalties."

Adultery is just the most extreme example of betraying one's loyalty to another. But we

currently engage in far more subtle forms of this betrayal. With the dawn of the Messianic Age we will no longer compromise our relationships – any of them.

Betrayal is the consequence when we forget that certain individuals deserve more love and attention than others. One of the worst forms of contemporary evil is the attempt to make everyone equal by declaration. This leads to our having no special relationships with anyone. Instead we extend our care and concern to everyone, and in so doing dilute them. The Torah demands that we discriminate between people. We must treat our spouses differently from everyone else. There are also special roles for a friend, members of one's family and extended family and the Jewish people.

The problem with relationships throughout history has been their pendulum-like swings in opposite directions. Either we demonize those who are not like us and erect barriers between us or, quixotically, we declare the equality of every member of society. Both systems—which reached their nadir of evil with the Nazi and Stalinist ideologies—are

responsible for the greatest inhumanity to, and betrayal of the other.

In the Messianic Age, while we will grasp the underlying unity of all existence, we will still be able to recognize our unique relationships for what they truly are: precious.

The Supremacy of the Physical World

8. "You will not disrespect the integrity of the physical world."

According to the Talmud, this statement in its "commandment mode" prohibits kidnapping, but by extension, it may include all forms of theft.

Although, it may seem counterintuitive, a lack of respect for the physical world, and its role in realizing the purpose of creation, underlies the evil of theft in all its forms.

When G-d gives us our bodies, and by extension our material possessions, He does so with a purpose. Our physical aspect is not evil. On the contrary, it is the only channel we have to connect to G-d. The only way we can connect to Him is by performing a

mitzvah which involves our bodies and our possessions. However, each one of us is given our own exclusive body and possessions to refine and elevate. Stealing another's physical resources (be they body or material) denies that person the ability to elevate the physical world and fulfill its purpose.

In the Messianic Age, we will come to a complete understanding of the value of the physical and how our bodies and possessions are ours to use in the service of G-d.

True Integrity

9. "You will not misrepresent who you truly are."

At the present time we misrepresent ("bear false witness") ourselves by not having our lives in perfect alignment with G-d and our soul's true nature. Just as if we were to complain of the cold in the midst of the heat of summer, we a misrepresent reality. When we go in directions inconsistent with our mission and soul, we are, in effect, bearing false testimony about who we really are and whom we represent.

In the Messianic Age, there will be no dichotomy between the reality of who we are and how we comport ourselves.

No Need for Rivalry

10. "You will not need to covet your neighbor's possessions and resort to the motivating force of rivalry."

The last statement of Maimonides' Code of Law, in which he describes the more advanced stages of the Messianic Age, mentions that there will be no more jealousy and rivalry because everything will be abundant and the world will be deluged with the knowledge G-d.

It would seem that rivalry and jealousy are the last human frailties that will be remedied. Because, after all is said and done, rivalry is part of what motivates us to grow. To get rid of rivalry prematurely might stifle our spiritual progress. We may never be content with our spiritual lives. However, once we have seen the fulfillment of the preceding nine declarations, which will enable us to say

"mission accomplished," then can we shed our need for rivalry entirely.

The Dispute

The Ten Commandments are featured in this week's parsha.

There is a dispute among the legal authorities on the custom to stand while the Ten Commandments are read in public. Maimonides was queried about this question and he strongly discouraged this practice. He bases himself on the statement in the Talmud that the Sages sought to include the recitation of the Ten Commandments as part of the daily liturgy alongside the recitation of the Shema. The rabbis negated this practice because of the fear that the heretics would use the highlighting of the Ten Commandments as a suggestion that Judaism consists of only these ten statements, to the exclusion of all the other teachings of Judaism.

To have everyone stand for the reading of this section only, Maimonides reasoned, would lend support to the erroneous belief

that only these Ten Commandments are important.

Other authorities take issue with Maimonides' comparison and make the distinction between including only the Ten Commandments in the daily liturgy and standing for the reading of the Ten Commandments. In the latter situation, since the entire Torah portion is read aloud, everyone will realize that the Ten Commandments, notwithstanding their singular importance, did not preclude the other parts of the Torah.

To this day there are variant customs on this matter of sitting or standing while the Ten Commandments are read.

That's Our Custom!

A humorous story is told of a young rabbi who assumed his position as rabbi during the week when the Ten Commandments were read in the synagogue. No sooner do they reach the Ten Commandments, and pandemonium breaks loose. Half of the crowd stood while the other half defiantly remained

seated; each side shouting and hurling insults at the other side.

The young rabbi decided to seek out the retired and aged rabbi of the synagogue to determine its original custom. He described the chaotic situation and the arguing that prevailed in the synagogue to this senior rabbi, and asked him, what the original custom of the shul was. The rabbi's answer was: "That was precisely the custom of our synagogue; half would stand and the other half would sit and they would all be shouting at each other."

The Irony of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith?

It is interesting to note that Maimonides was the one who formulated the Thirteen Principles of Faith, for which he was criticized. One of the criticisms was that he had singled out certain beliefs from the rest of Judaism. This was akin to promoting the Ten Commandments at the expense of all the others.

Isn't it ironic that Maimonides, who took such a strong stance against standing for the reading of the Ten Commandments, was the one who formulated these 13 fundamental principles? Why wasn't Maimonides concerned that the people might consider these 13 principles as exclusionary as he was with the Ten Commandments?

Two explanations come to mind.

First, among the thirteen principles one finds two that speak of the Divine origin of the entire Torah—Written and Oral—and that the Torah can never be abrogated. No sane person after reading this list of principles would then go out and declare that one does not have to follow the rest of the Torah!

A Foundation and a Structure

Second, Maimonides formulation of Thirteen Principles of Faith was intended to provide us with a foundation for Judaism.

While Judaism is a religion primarily of action, one cannot expect these actions to

have meaning and endure if they are not based on a firm footing.

It is like a person who builds a home, but tells the contractor that in the interest of speed he should skimp on the foundation. While the structure has a function, it will not last very long. The slightest seismic event will undermine the structure.

Conversely, if we were to build only a foundation it would defeat the entire purpose of building the structure in the first place.

Thus, Maimonides wanted us to have both a solid foundation as well as an appreciation for the integrity of the structure of Judaism itself.

To this end Maimonides strongly criticized any attempt to accord more importance to any one collection of teachings, including the Ten Commandments.

On the other hand, Maimonides wanted that we should understand that Judaism consists of an elaborate edifice that was built on solid foundations. And when one closely examines these foundations one sees how they demand and encompass the totality of Judaism.

Belief in Moshiach is Belief in All of Judaism

One of the Thirteen Principle (the 12th one) is the belief in the imminent coming of Moshiach.

When one examines the belief in Moshiach one sees how it leads to the acceptance of and appreciation for all of Judaism. In Maimonides' own words in his Mishneh Torah, Moshiach's task is to usher in a world that will facilitate the observance of all of the Commandments without any impediments or distractions.

Not only is this knowledge not suggestive of a belief that excludes other tenets and practices of Judaism, but, on the contrary, the very definition of a Messianic Age is one where the integrity of the entire Torah is ensured and enhanced.

The Thirteenth Principle of Faith actually incorporates all the preceding within it. In the Messianic Age we will all be exposed to the reality of One incorporeal Creator who communicated His Torah to us so that we

transform the world into a dwelling place for G-d.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

KIDNAPPED

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

KIDNAPPED

Kidnapping, Not Theft

One of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not steal." According to our oral tradition, as recorded in the Talmud, it refers not to theft of property, but to kidnapping which is a capital crime, and is in line with the two preceding capital offenses of murder and adultery. The prohibition against monetary theft is actually mentioned in Leviticus.

To incur the death penalty for kidnapping, however, the Torah tell us, one must also sell the victim.

The Ten Commandments were singled out from all others in the Torah because they serve as fundamental teachings and convey far more than just their literal meaning. To be sure, the first and foremost meaning of the Biblical text here is the simple meaning

that we should not commit these heinous crimes. However, since the Ten Commandments must speak to a civilized human being as well—one who would never even allow a thought to commit such crimes to enter his mind—these teachings must also possess a more subtle meaning, that is relevant to all.

A Subtle form of Murder, Adultery and Kidnapping

The crime of murder is one where we create a separation between the body and soul of the victim. Thus the Talmud states that by embarrassing someone in public one is guilty of the crime of bloodshed. The rationale behind that is that embarrassing someone indicates that one does not respect their human dignity. The one who embarrasses another has separated the person from his honor and dignity.

One can take this a step further. One can be guilty of "murder" anytime he or she demonstrates a sense of disregard for and a sense of disconnectedness from his or her

spiritual and G-dly self. Denying the existence of the soul or denigrating it is a subtle form of bloodshed.

Following this line of reasoning, the prohibition against adultery can refer to people who do acknowledge the existence of the soul and spiritual dimension of life. Their problem is that they pledge allegiance to multiple influences in their lifves. In addition to their professed belief in G-d, they will also show loyalty to other ism's and belief systems that are not consistent with our belief in G-d.

While there is certainly much value in the arts and sciences, it is because they are part of G-d's universe, not because they have value independent of their Creator. Indeed, our Sages at the very end of Ethics of the Fathers declare, "All that G-d created, He created it for His glory." If one uses science and literature to see the presence of G-d and glorify Him, then these disciplines do not represent a compromise of one's loyalty, rather an affirmation of it. However, when one separates these areas of knowledge from the oneness of G-d, then, in a subtle sense,

one has committed adultery, by having multiple loyalties.

There is a third level where one does not reject the existence of a spiritual dimension and does not even share his loyalty to G-d with other influences. The "problem" here is that the person has "kidnapped" and "sold" his spiritual identity. This refers to the person who appreciates, all too well, the existence and benefits of spirituality. However, he utilizes its life-enhancing capacity to extract some profit and gain in an area that is inconsistent with the spirituality.

For example: Among the features of a G-dly awareness is that it creates a sense of excitement, generates enthusiasm and inspiration. A materialistic existence, by contrast, is dull and devoid of feeling. The body—without the involvement of the soul—cannot feel joy and happiness. Depression occurs when the body and animal nature eclipses the natural zest for life that comes from the soul.

To kidnap and sell one's spirituality is to get excited about some non-G-dly enterprise.

When one invests their soul in business, golf and tennis, or any other mundane pursuit, rather than to get excited about Torah and Mitzvos, while not destroying their spiritual nature or compromising it, they transfer it to another domain.

To be sure, there is nothing inherently wrong with many of these activities. It is the investment of one's soul-energy into these areas instead of the areas for which it was intended that is, in a subtle way, a violation of the commandment not to kidnap and sell. Don't divert your soul from its mission and don't try to derive benefit from it for the wrong endeavor.

Don't Take the Bus to Work; Drive Your Luxury Car!

This can be compared to a person who is given a luxury car for business purposes so that they can get to their place of work more quickly, enjoyably and with more class and dignity. Instead this individual uses the car for leisure and takes the crowded subway or bus to work.

Similarly, G-d gave us the soul and all its faculties for **His** business of making this world into a G-dly and holy world. To the extent that we use our business and our leisure activities for that goal, one has a right—nay, an obligation—to enjoy life and be filled with a zest for life. However, to take the excitement of the soul and use it for other purposes while "taking the subway" to achieve our spiritual goals is a subtle way of violating this eighth commandment.

Messianic Age: No Diversions

Unfortunately, one of the casualties of exile life is that we are not aware of our soul's mission, which can lead to its diversion into other areas. One of the characteristics of the Messianic Age is that our souls and all of its powers—will be directed in the right place, that will bring life, joy and fulfillment to all of our endeavors.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF THE FUTURE

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF THE FUTURE

Fulfilling the Purpose of Creation

In his classic work Tanya, the Alter Rebbe expounds on the revelation at Mount Sinai. What happened there was more than just the giving of a set of ten commandments, most of which were already known. Far more significantly, it was an unprecedented revelation of G-d's presence in our physical world. No longer were the physical and the spiritual realms disparate entities.

The Alter Rebbe cites the famous words of the Midrash as to the *raison d'etre* of Creation: "G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowest of realms." G-d's reason for creating a physical existence for the world was to have the People make it a receptive place for His presence by fulfilling His commandments. With the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai,

one who performs a Mitzvah with his physical body, or with a physical object, introduces Divine energy into the physical world and helps make it a dwelling place for G-d.

However, the Alter Rebbe adds, the revelation at Mount Sinai was a one-time event. What happened at Sinai was the beginning of a process that will come full circle with the Messianic Age. At that time, G-d's presence in our world will become a permanent reality.

It may be suggested that if the revelation at Sinai was the beginning of the road to Redemption it should be reflected in the initial communication, the so-called Ten Commandments. And, in fact, it is.

The Promise

The First Commandment is: "I am the L-rd your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of Bondage."

The scholarly medieval work known as the Semak states that the commandment contains a fundamental promise: just as G-d liberated

us from the Egyptian bondage, so too will He liberate us from the present exile.

In G-d's Presence

The Second Commandment is: "You shall not have the gods of others in My presence."

The words "My presence" imply that idolatry and G-d's presence are mutually exclusive. For idolatry to exist, in any form, the idolators can not be aware of G-d's presence; otherwise, they would worship Him instead of their idols. In the Messianic Age, when the veil that obscures the truth of G-d's presence is finally removed, no vestige of idolatry, even in its most subtle form, will be able to survive.

We can now rephrase the Second Commandment to read as a declaration rather than a mandate:

"You will not have the gods of others, **because** you will all be in My presence..." This construction reflects the many Biblical prophecies that all foreign deities will be eliminated. The Aleinu prayer, recited thrice

daily at the end of our services, demonstrates our yearning for fulfillment of this prophecy.

Restoring Stability

The Third Commandment is: "You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain, for the L-rd will not hold blameless anyone who takes His name in vain."

This commandment is unique. It is the only one which G-d says He will not forgive. The Talmud states that the entire world shook when G-d uttered this commandment. Why is this transgression singled out from among all the others?

The answer is that all the other transgressions are committed in spite of G-d. Either one forgets G-d's presence or, heaven forbid, even rebels against Him. This specific transgression can only be committed by making G-d's name an "accomplice" to the crime. We can see in this transgression the ultimate state of exile, where not only is G-d's presence veiled, it is actually transformed into an agent of evil, G-d forbid.

Hence the Third Commandment warns us how low one can go as a result of Galus conditions. The first level of degradation, represented by the Second Commandment, is the concealment of G-d's presence. From there, it degrades even further into the perversion of using G-d for evil.

These two characteristics of Galus have come to the fore in recent times. The world today, including its academics and journalists, is plagued with a secular tyranny that denies G-d and repudiates the very notion of absolute standards of morality and righteousness. Simultaneously, we are witness to the appalling evil of terrorism "in the name of G-d," as was tragically evidenced in the terrible massacres in Paris a few weeks ago.

The final Redemption will end these distortions of reality. The Third Commandment thus declares that "You will not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain…" This phenomenon can only occur in a Galus-oriented world that is inherently unstable.

This present instability, which enables G-d's power to be so sullied, echoes the instability of the world before Sinai. It was only when the world's purpose for existence was validated by the giving of the Torah that the world stopped trembling, according to the Talmud. Thus, with G-d's declaration that "I am the L-rd your G-d..." G-d's presence and a concomitant stability were introduced to the world. However, whenever a person swears falsely and diverts G-d's energy into his falsehood, it returns the world to its pre-Sinai instability and reverses the very mechanism for Redemption.

The Sabbath of Existence

The Fourth Commandment is: "Remember the Sabbath and sanctify it."

This commandment alludes literally to the seventh day but its deeper reference is to the seventh millennium, the ultimate Sabbath of creation. By telling us to remember it, the Torah is also hinting that when we observe Shabbos today we should remember that it is an allusion to the Messianic Era which we

know is the Shabbos of creation. It is the time that we will enjoy true stability and tranquility.

The Length of Days of the Future

The Fifth Commandment is: "Honor your father and mother, in order that your days be lengthened on the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you." Our Sages state that "long life" here refers to long life in the future Messianic Age, particularly in the period after *Techiyas Hameisim*, when the dead are restored to life.

In summation, the first five commandments tell the following story:

G-d will redeem us. We will bask in His presence. The world will become a stable and tranquil dwelling place as the prelude to the time when we live forever.

The Divinity of the Body

The Sixth Commandment is "You shall not commit murder." Many have asked why the Torah had to command us to avoid such a

heinous crime? Isn't its evil nature self-evident?

One answer is that the focus here is not on the moral degradation of the murderer; that needs no special mention. Rather, the seriousness of this crime derives from its denial of the belief that every individual body is created in G-d's image. This is a repudiation of the G-dly value of the physical body. Many non-Torah spiritual ideologies regard the body as lacking intrinsic holiness. At best, the body is seen as a temporary "Temple of the soul." In Judaism, however, the body is rooted in G-d's essence and it was the body that G-d chose at Mount Sinai.

Chassidic philosophy reveals that this unique status of the body will be fully revealed in the Messianic Age, especially after the Resurrection of the Dead. At that time, the full extent of the body's intrinsic G-dly nature will not only be revealed but the body will be viewed even as superior to the soul! The root of this notion is the commandment against murder. The Torah is in effect declaring: "Do not under-estimate the G-dly nature of the body."

The Ultimate Marriage

The Seventh Commandment is "You shall not commit adultery."

Here too, the Torah wishes to go beyond the conventional wisdom that adultery is a crime against morality. While certainly true, there was no need for the fanfare of Sinai to teach such an elementary law. Many other cultures honor this command without having been made aware of the Ten Commandments. Rather, this law is about appreciating and respecting the awesome G-dly nature of the physical relationship between husband and wife. In some other religious ideologies, marriage and intimacy are seen as a necessary evil to control and curb our animalistic desires. In Judaism, it is the source for introducing the most sublime Divine energies into our world.

Indeed, marriage of a man and a woman is a micro version of the ultimate marriage between G-d and the Jewish people. Fidelity in marriage as the holiest institution in existence is a precursor to that future

marriage that occurred at Sinai and will be consummated in the Messianic Age. This commandment alludes to the exclusivity of our relationship with G-d.

The G-dliness Within the Physical

The Eighth Commandment is "You shall not steal."

Although our Sages teach us that the principle meaning of this commandment is not to kidnap, it also alludes to the general law against theft of property. This too reflects the sophisticated way Judaism views physical objects and property. If it were merely a command against stealing another's property it would not have necessitated the imposing accompaniment of thunder and lightning. Rather, it is a testament to the way we ought to view the physical world. G-d's purpose in creation—which will be fully realized in the Messianic Age—is not for the spiritual realms, but for our physical world. By respecting the integrity of property we demonstrate that we respect the integrity of the physical world and the role that each

person is given to cultivate and elevate his or her personal property by revealing its true G-dly essence.

We are G-d's Witnesses

The Ninth Commandment is: "You shall not bear false witness against your fellow."

We are created as witnesses to G-d's existence and presence in our world. When we are in exile we are unable to serve G-d adequately; many of His commandments cannot presently be fulfilled. Furthermore, we no longer have the Holy Temple, where G-d's presence was revealed. We are thus incapable of testifying fully to G-d's presence. That lack will be remedied in the Messianic Age.

No More Jealousy

The Tenth and final Commandment is: "You shall not covet..."

The very last redemptive change to humanity that will occur is spelled out in Maimonides' conclusion to his Mishneh Torah: "In that age there will be no more jealousy and rivalry..."

The deeply embedded human failing of envy, cause of the very first crime against another human when Cain killed Abel, will finally be rectified in the Messianic Age.

To summarize the last five commandments:

In the Messianic Age we will appreciate the Divine character of the physical body; experience the ultimate marriage; value the physical world; be empowered to be complete witnesses of G-d and to overcome the last of our human frailties.

Today our challenge is to anticipate these changes and attempt to implement them in our daily lives. This will prepare us for the imminent coming of Moshiach and the unfolding of the Final Redemption!

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

THE ECHO-LESS SOUND OF TORAH II

Torah is unique because it is G-d's only direct communication with every Jew.

Nature, although G-d's creation, can only pick up an echo of His original voice.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

THE ECHO-LESS SOUND OF TORAH II

Why the Miracle?

In this week's Torah portion, Moses describes the voice of G-d at the Revelation at Mount Sinai, saying:

> A great voice, which did not continue.

One of the explanations that the Midrash offers for this is that G-d's voice did not have an echo.

The Midrash's answer seems to present a few problems.

First, how does the absence of an echo indicate greatness? If the voice was indeed strong, would it not have produced an echo?

Second, why would G-d seemingly alter the laws of nature just so that his voice would not produce an echo?

A Penetrating Sound

The Rebbe explains that an echo is produced when sound waves hit an object. When the sound waves reach a wall, a mountain, or any such obstacle, they are bounced right back. The only condition to produce an echo is that the object which deflects the sound waves must be strong and rigid. If the object is soft and yielding, the sound will just be absorbed and no echo will result.

When G-d said, "I am G-d your G-d," his voice was so overwhelmingly powerful that there was nothing in the world that was strong enough to deflect the sound. G-d's voice actually penetrated and permeated the physical world. Every object in the world, from the inanimate to the higher forms of life, absorbed the G-dly voice and was affected by it.

The phenomenon of the Revelation at Sinai is akin to what will take place after Moshiach's arrival, which is described in these words: "And the glory of G-d will be revealed, and all flesh will see." Even our very bodies will be able to perceive G-dliness.

This is why G-d's voice had no echo. This was no miracle, and the laws of nature were not at all abrogated. It is, indeed, in keeping with physical law that when a sound is absorbed, no echo is produced. And since the voice was totally integrated into physical reality, there was nothing which can bounce the sound back. Therefore, the absence of an echo shows the infinite strength of the voice, rather than the opposite .

Whenever a Jew studies Torah, the holy voice of Torah penetrates his physical surroundings and elevates the world.

Our Rabbis say that in the World To Come, "the very beams of the house will bear witness," for they have been absorbing all the holiness produced when a person learns Torah in his home.

This explains why many tzadikim commanded that their coffins be made from the wood of their desks and tables where they learned Torah and gave food to the poor, for the Torah and Mitsvos were "absorbed" by the very planks themselves!

The power of Torah is such that nothing can stand in its way. The world was created in such a manner as to enable the continuing voice of Revelation to penetrate the corporeal world even today .

One may suggest an additional aspect of the echo-less aspect of the communication at Sinai.

Daughter of a Voice!

The term used for an echo in Hebrew Bas Kol. This expression translated literally means the "daughter of a voice." It implies that the voice or sound is not the original but a derivative.

This term is also used for a heavenly voice which is akin to, but not quite the same, as a prophetic measure. The communication from G-d that is described as a *Bas Kol* is one in which the original message comes to the recipient in an indirect fashion.

We can now better understand why the voice of G-d at Sinai had no *Bas-kol*. Not only does this mean that there was no echo because it

was absorbed into every fiber of existence. It also depicts the directedness of G-d's message to the world. It did not have to travel from on high and make many stops through various intermediaries to reach us down here on earth. It was G-d's direct communication to us.

Objection

One can raise an objection to this assertion.

Tanya, the classic work of Chabad Chassidus describes (Chapter 5) the way Torah had to journey through hidden steps to descend into our world. This would seem to imply that Torah does indeed come to us in secondary and tertiary intermediate steps and not a direct line from the "mouth of the Almighty."

Moreover, our Sages teach that only the first two commandments were heard directly from G-d, but the rest we did, in fact, get through Moses and other intermediaries.

Unchanged

Two interconnected answers can be given:

The first is that though the Torah goes through many stages it does not fundamentally change its essential Divine nature. As Tanya itself asserts that the Torah we have down here is G-d's very wisdom and will, and G-d and His wisdom and will are one."

Although all of existence goes through many contractions and so does Torah, what is the difference between the two ways in which G-d instills His energy?

A simple distinction is that there are two ways something can travel from point a to point b: either stopping at each juncture and experiencing and being affected by the culture of that area or just passing through.

For example, when one writes an idea, the idea passes through one's hand and pen, but it is not tainted or diminished in the least or watered down. The hand and the pen are mere conduits for the idea not teachers. By contrast, a teacher who uses a parable to explain an abstruse subject takes a lofty concept and simplifies it.

When G-d's energy entered our world in the process of Creation the G-dly energy undergoes major contractions and diminutions, referred to in Kabbalah as *tzimtzum.*

But the process through which Torah came into our physical world is comparable to the ideas that flow through the hand and pen. While it makes the idea accessible it has no effect on the idea. Torah down here is not any different than the Torah in the higher spheres; it is just made accessible.

The second answer is that, in fact, it was only the sounds of Sinai that penetrated all of existence. However implicit in those original sounds are all the subsequent teachings of Torah.

We really only had to hear the first two commandments because they comprise all the other commandments much like a seed contains within it all the future plants that come from it.

In effect, every Jew who stood at Mount Sinai heard the entire Torah as it was encapsulated in the first two commandments.

Connection to Moshiach

The above will help us in understanding what the prophet meant when he said that "a new Torah will emerge from Me."

It certainly does not mean that the Torah will change one iota, G-d forbid. It does, however, mean that new dimensions of Torah understanding will be revealed by Moshiach But these new teachings were already implicit in the original communication at Sinai.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX
NO MORE JEALOUSY

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

NO MORE JEALOUSY

The Last Commandment

One of the most significant sections of this week's parsha is Moses' repetition of the Ten Commandments (more accurately, the Ten Statements) that were mentioned for the first time in the book of Exodus.

There is a principle of Talmudic interpretation that "everything follows the end." This means, for example, that the very last item on a Torah list captures the essence of that entire list. In our case, the very last commandment repeated in this week's parsha (albeit, with some additional detail) is:

> And you shall not covet your fellows wife, you shall not desire your fellows house, his field, his slave, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that belongs to your fellow.

Does the fact that this is the final commandment suggest that it expresses the ultimate goal of Judaism? Our challenge is to find some way of understanding that it encapsulates all of the commandments.

It is interesting to note that Maimonides concludes his Mishneh Torah by describing the Messianic Age. In his very last paragraph, he describes a world in which there will be no more jealousy.

This placement suggests that Maimonides considers the lack of jealously to be the ultimate goal of the Messianic Age; furthermore, it will take more time to achieve this milestone than any of the other monumental changes that will occur during the Messianic Age.

Why, we may ask, is this human failure of coveting and jealousy considered so ingrained in our consciousness that its elimination will represent the crowning event of the Age of Redemption?

To underscore the daunting challenge of overcoming envy, we should reflect on the fact that the very first crime committed by

one human against another was Cain's murder of Abel. He became enraged with the envy he felt when G-d accepted Abel's offering and not his own. Envy was the first example of the breakdown of human relationships and it seems destined that it will be the last thing to be rectified.

Respect for Boundaries

Envy demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the boundaries G-d created in this world. It derives from a piercing, primitive feeling that if another person has something desirable, then I am entitled to have it instead. It is a failure to appreciate that, as our Sages put it, "A person cannot encroach upon what I set aside for his fellow." G-d gave each person the resources that were intended for him or her.

The issue of boundaries, in a broader sense, informs all of the commandments. It is G-d Who gave us limits and erected barriers between us and the world around us. He did not intend us to indulge in our every whim. However, the paradigm for all these

restrictions is the tenth commandment: do not covet.

The question can be raised why envy has posed such a formidable challenge for us? Why is it so difficult to expunge our covetousness? Why will we have to wait for the Messianic Age (and perhaps, even for one of its more advanced stages, as one can infer from Maimonides placing this promise at the end of his discussion of the Messianic Age) to see the disappearance of jealousy?

Removing Borders

While this commandment underscores the need for us to respect boundaries, there are at least two other Torah imperatives for us to not be stifled or restricted by them.

Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter 5:10) states:

> One who says... 'mine is mine and yours is yours,' this is the average characteristic, and some say this is the characteristic of Sodom.

As commentators point out, to turn selfishness into a philosophy as they did in

Sodom is manifestly evil. On one hand it sounds reasonable and as though it is based on a healthy respect for the integrity of our possessions as well as the other's. On the other hand, it smacks of the inhospitable Sodomite people who could never cross over the fence that separated them from the outsider.

G-d wants us to give freely of our own resources to others. Ideally, we should transcend our sense of ownership to say "mine is yours and yours is yours." The ideal is not to be boxed in by borders but to transcend them.

Second, the Talmud states that every individual has to say "the world was created for me." This is intended to teach each individual to feel responsibility for the entire world. Moreover, the Jewish people were directly instructed that each individual is responsible for the other. There is a Biblical commandment to rebuke others who fail to fulfill their responsibilities. "Mind your own business" was never a Jewish slogan. Everyone else's business is our business!

These two factors – that we must give of our own to others and that we are responsible for others – can be a double-edged sword. While we reach out to help the other we may lose sight of and be insensitive to the other's privacy. Indeed, once we cross the line and trespass into the other's territory we might look to see what the other possesses, sparking a feeling of envy. The coveter may feel he or she has license to trespass and encroach on the private lives of others because of the Torah's insistence that we reach out to them sometimes.

We can easily see how a person who emphasizes one aspect of Jewish life can forget that there are other imperatives that require us to go in an opposite direction. As we cross over into the domain of others in order to help them, we must still respect their privacy.

Even in marriage which, according to the Zohar, is the reunion of two half souls separated at birth, one must allow for the husband and wife to have their own spaces. This is reflected in the law of family purity that mandates periods of physical separation

in a marriage. These periods of separation ensure that the partners in life do not violate each others' boundaries.

Balance!

We can now see why envy is the last human failure to be corrected. It simply requires the most powerful form of balance.

Had the Torah not imposed on us the need to remove barriers between people by helping and taking responsibility for them, it would not be so difficult a challenge to banish envy. People who mind their own business are less likely to be tempted to look into each other's domain and covet their possessions.

It is precisely those people, the ones who are obsessed with reaching out to help others and ignore all the boundaries, who may disregard the borders necessary to guarantee the integrity of each individual.

The power to integrate the two, both to respect the boundaries and be able to transcend them, will be fully operational only in the Messianic Age.

Ten Commandments - Horizontally

The Ten Commandments were given on two tablets. According to the Midrash, they were placed side by side and we can therefore read them either vertically, from one to ten, or horizontally, i.e., the first commandment followed by the sixth, the second followed by the seventh etc. Accordingly, the commandment which precedes the one about coveting is to "honor your father and mother."

What is the connection between filial responsibility and not coveting?

One may suggest that just as there are geographic boundaries there are also chronologic borders. Honoring our parents is our way of respecting their seniority and not treating them as our peers. Honoring our parents is a paradigm for all of the commandments in the Torah that require of us to respect people from an earlier time frame, which includes parents, teachers, senior citizens and authority figures.

Envy and Lack of Respect: Challenge of Modernity

It seems, though, that much like envy, proper respect for elders and authority figures is one of the most elusive challenges of our time. Indeed, the Mishnah declares that in the last days before the coming of Moshiach there will be much chutzpah with the young rebelling against their elders.

What is the cause of this phenomenon?

Here too the answer is that the Torah demands that we remove the barriers between generations even as we, paradoxically, respect those barriers. We are living in times where the elders have to listen more carefully to the needs and demands of the youth because in many ways they are the more altruistic group.

Even in the distant past, our Sages spoke of how a teacher gets the most knowledge from his students, even more so than from his teachers and colleagues.

In Messianic times, the prophet Malachi predicts, "The hearts of the fathers will be returned to G-d through the children."

Because the division between young and old has been partially erased we have therefore witnessed a breakdown in the needed boundaries.

Living the Paradox

The challenge today is not only to find the right balance; the ultimate goal is to introduce a trans-boundary energy within the boundaries.

This was the power vested in the Bais Hamikdash, the most significant part of which was the Ark. While the Ark, our Sages tell us, had precisely prescribed dimensions it miraculously occupied no **physical** space in the Temple. It introduced a Divine power that transcends space into the very parameters of space.

This is why we focus on rebuilding the Bais Hamikdash-the Holy Temple in these days before and after Tisha B'Av. It will enable us to create the energy that will take us beyond our prescribed borders into a world of precise measurements and boundaries.

Fusion of Revealed and Esoteric Parts of Torah

Another paradox of the co-existence of barriers and barrier transcending power is the division between the revealed teachings of Torah, such as its laws, and the inner dimension and mystical aspects of Torah knowledge. For thousands of years this body of esoteric knowledge was kept secret. There was a clear separation between these two disciplines. But, in the last few hundred years, particularly with the advent of Chassidus, that wall of separation has come down. This mystical knowledge has been publicized and made accessible to countless individuals.

However, these teachings remain in a category of their own and the separation still exists. Here too we can see the Messianic phenomenon materializing: the fusion of two opposite worlds, with the removal of barriers even as we preserve their integrity.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

PUT YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOUR EARS!

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

PUT YOUR MOUTH BEFORE YOUR EARS

Putting the Cart before the Horse

When the Torah was offered to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, they responded, *Na'aseh v'nishma*, We will do and we will hear and understand." Our Talmudic sages interpret this to mean that the Jews were willing to accept the Torah before they even heard what was in it and what it was all about.

The Talmud describes this unusual response to G-d on the part of the Jewish nation as: "They put their mouths before their ears," i.e., they declared their unqualified acceptance of the Torah and pledged their unconditional commitment to it even before they were informed of the content of the Torah or understood the meaning of its commandments.

As a reward for their unconditional acceptance of the Torah, they were rewarded with two crowns, "one for `we will do,' and one for 'we will hear.'"

Why Two Crowns?

Upon close reflection, one can raise the question as to why they received **two** crowns. Had they not prefaced "we will do" before "we will hear" they would have received no reward. Why then did they receive two crowns for saying `we will do' before `we will hear'?

The answer lies in the difference between the Jewish people's desire to understand the Torah after they had accepted it unconditionally, as opposed to the independent desire to understand the Torah that is not preceded by unconditional acceptance of it.

Normally, when we seek to learn something, it is based on our own desire and interest. Understanding leads to appreciation and pleasure. In effect, the desire to understand and appreciate the Torah possesses no

inherently special virtue. It is no more and no less than a natural sense of intellectual curiosity, which can be healthy and good if it is used for good purposes. But, intellectual curiosity, in and of itself—while more sophisticated—is no more virtuous than a desire for a nice home, or any other material acquisition.

When the Jewish people said 'we will hear and understand' **after** first accepting the Torah unconditionally, their desire to understand was of a qualitatively different nature than standard intellectual curiosity. It was as bold and unique as their willingness to embrace the Torah without first hearing what it was all about.

Not only was their acceptance of the Torah based on their desire to subordinate themselves to G-d, but also their desire to learn and understand the Torah was rooted in the conviction that this too was G-d's will. For not only does G-d want us to perform the Mitzvos because G-d said so, G-d also wants us to understand the Mitzvos—to the extent that we are capable of doing so.

Their desire to understand Torah, thus, was not only born out of intellectual curiosity, but it was grounded primarily in their realization that G-d wants us to comprehend His teachings as well as committing ourselves to their fulfillment.

If they were to say, "We are satisfied with our observance of the Mitzvos, why do we have to tax our minds to comprehend them," it would have constituted only a partial acceptance of G-d's will. One's mind, the most important human faculty, would have remained detached from G-d's will.

We can now understand why G-d gave them two crowns, because not only were they prepared to surrender their **will** and **actions** to G-d, they were also willing to dedicate their **minds** to G-d. And the willingness to dedicate their minds to G-d was because they sensed that this too was G-d's will

Delayed Response

This will also shed light on why the declaration of *Na'aseh v'nishma*-'We will do and we will hear and understand' is not

mentioned in last week's Torah portion where the entire narrative of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai is featured. Instead, this declaration is mentioned in *this* week's Torah portion, *Mishpatim,* which focuses on those commandments that we can understand.

However, the inclusion of their declaration in this *parsha* that focuses on the rational aspects of Torah, underscores the extent of their dedication. Not only did they subordinate their will and actions to G-d, but also their minds. After accepting all of the commandments without first understanding them, they then proceeded to a second level: of attempting to get their mindsets conform to the mindset of G-d; to make their human intellect grasp the Divine intellect, because this too is G-d's will.

Harbinger of the Messianic Age

When the topic of what will life be like in the Messianic Age is broached, invariably images of spiritual life come to mind. We will all become more spiritual, more G-dly like

angels. And despite the fact that we've never seen an angel before, our image of them and of our future is one that defies rational thought.

In truth, one of the most salient features of the Messianic Age will be the reverse. As Maimonides concludes his classic work *Mishneh Torah* with the description of the Messianic Age as a time when we will be "great sages and know the hidden knowledge, grasp the Divine mind according to the extent that is humanly possible, as it says, 'And the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea."

Even the most esoteric and elusive Divine knowledge will become accessible to our human minds. What began at Sinai—the declaration of the Jewish people that they want do accept G-d's will and that they want to **fathom** G-d's will as well—will come to fruition during the Messianic Age. That time will be characterized as an age in which G-d's laws will be accepted and His existence, His Torah and Mitzvos—and even the way that

He conducts the world—will become intelligible to our finite human minds.

To take an infinite G-d Who created logic and nature and have Him enter our finite consciousness is nothing short of a miracle of unprecedented proportions. There is nothing more impossible than something infinite being apprehended and grasped by something finite.

For this to happen, G-d must reveal His very Essence, which transcends even the boundaries of infinity! G-d is not bound by the "limits" of infinity which does not allow it to be contained within a finite mind. In the Messianic Age G-d's Essence—which transcends both infinity and finitude—will enable our finite human minds to absorb and digest infinite G-dly knowledge.

ESSAY TWENTY EIGHT

BLINTZES WITH DISCIPLINE

ESSAY TWENTY EIGHT

BLINTZES WITH DISCIPLINE

Why do we eat dairy foods such as Blintzes on Shavuot? There are many answers to this question, but the following one provides us with some profound insight as to what distinguishes us as humans.

When Moses alighted onto Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the angels upon seeing that the Torah was about to be transferred from the heavens to the earth, protested. "Why would a mortal want such a glorious thing as the Torah?" they intoned.

The A-mighty asked Moses to supply them with an answer. According to the Talmud, Moses' reply to them was: "The Torah states, 'I am the L-rd your G-d who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.' Have you ever lived in Egypt? The Torah commands us not to

murder or steal. Do you have the impulse to commit these crimes?" With questions like these, that they could not refute, Moses prevailed, and the rest is history.

The Midrash, adds one other interesting argument Moses used to counter the angels insistence that the Torah remain in Heaven. Moses reminded them of an event that had transpired hundreds of years earlier when three angel, disguised as people, were treated to Abraham's hospitality. At that repast the were served milk and meat.

"If you are so keen about the Torah," Moses asked, "why did you not adhere to one of its precepts of not eating milk and meat?" The angels had no defense and the Torah was given to the Jewish people.

This is why we eat a dairy meal, **followed** (either a half-hour or hour later, according to the various customs in this regard) by a meat meal, to demonstrate that it was this Mitzvah of separating between dairy and meat that got us the Torah.

What was lacking in the argument that angels have no inclination to commit murder and

other crimes that necessitated the argument from the prohibition against milk and meat? Furthermore, why would angels be required to keep this commandment if the Torah had not yet been given?

The answer to these questions lies in the unique nature of the Mitzvah to not mix milk and meat. To not kill or steal one only needs to have the moral character and ability to have his mind control his heart. That angels do not have the desire to commit a crime is due to the fact that they are superior to humans in this regard and have no need to curb their temptations. That is not sufficient of a reason to deny them the spiritual teachings of Torah that was to be given to a human being who can succumb to temptation.

However, the fact that they did not know how to balance the separation between milk and meat, was an indication that angels are truly inferior to humans.

To be human is to know how to bring discipline in one's life. To be sure, angels don't need to be disciplined because they are

programmed to be precisely what G-d wants them to be. However, they also don't have the advantage of being disciplined.

To better understand the advantage of being disciplined, we must first preface our understanding of the different approaches to serving G-d:

The first and highest approach is to accept G-d's authority, unconditionally. This angels are certainly good at, and why not? Do they have an evil impulse that tells them not to accept G-d's authority? Indeed, they are superior to us in this direction.

A second approach is to appreciate the value of a particular act or the damage a negative act can bring. Angels are superior to us in that regard, as well. Angels—often referred to as celestial animals—have a much keener sense of smell. They are far more sensitive to the nuances of a particular act, holy or otherwise.

But, put an angel in a situation where his "sense of smell" is curtailed, he will no longer be repulsed by an improper act unless he is expressly told not to do it.

When the angels came to Abraham, their human disguise also masked their ability to sense the odious nature of the mixture of milk and meat. And since they were not given the commandment to desist from eating that mixture they partook of it.

And here is where a human being's capacity exceeds that of an angel. The human being, even when his sense of spiritual sensitivity is compromised, can still maintain the high standard of morality and spiritually because we have the capacity to discipline ourselves. Through persistent behavior we can change our nature and maintain a high moral and spiritual standard regardless of our sensitivity. A person can condition himself or herself to perform a prescribed act or to resist a proscribed act. The angle can either submit to an higher authority or to sniff out right from wrong much like his terrestrial animal counterpart. A human being can self-discipline and develop heightened sensitivity.

The next time you eat cheese blintzes on Shavuot, remember that it signifies that concept that we are capable of altering

ourselves. And that is what gets us the prize—the Torah.

Similarly, as we stand poised to enter into the Age of Redemption, we must remember that nothing is programmed for us, except for our independent nature that enable us to change our nature and the nature of the entire world, thereby paving the way for the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-NINE
MAZAL TOV BAR MITZVAH

ESSAY TWENTY-NINE

MAZAL TOV BAR MITZVAH

Shavuot is unfortunately a much ignored holiday, these days, partly because there are fewer rituals associated with it than with other more popular holidays. . On Passover, for example, we have a Seder; on Rosh Hashanah we have the Shofar, on Chanukah the Menorah etc. But, on Shavuot there is relatively little that we do in the form of prescribed rituals.

Shavuot, however, is far from a minor or insignificant Holiday. It is the anniversary of our very existence as a people. While, it is true that the Jewish nation was born on Passover, when they were liberated from Egyptian bondage, nevertheless, our existence as a nation was not **completed** until we received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Had we not been given the Torah fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt, we would

have been a people without a purpose and goal and hence without a real identity as well. In the words of the great Sage, Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon*: "We are a nation only by virtue of the Torah." Without the Torah, our freedom notwithstanding, we would have been relegated to the ash-heap of history, like a multitude of other nations and empires who have vanished.

Only our acceptance of the Torah at Sinai 3,300 years ago, provided us with the ability to survive. Jews did not have a common language for most of their history, nor did they have their own country for most of their history. Yet, unlike so many other cultures, we survived, because we had the Torah.

Shavuot is thus the celebration of our identity and the miracle of our survival.

If Passover has been described as the birth of the Jewish people, then Shavuot could be described as their collective Bar Mitzvah. Shavuot is when the Jewish people were given, and they accepted, the responsibility to perform all of the commandments, just as a Bar Mitzvah boy or

Bat Mitzvah girl accepts all of his/her responsibilities as Jews.

The Bar Mitzvah metaphor can shed light on the significance of Shavuot. Just as a Bar Mitzvah is not born that way, but has to go through 13 years of education and training, similarly, the Jewish people had to go through a period of preparation after the Exodus to get them ready for their Bar Mitzvah experience.

There is a more profound aspect of the Bar Mitzvah metaphor. In our mystical literature we are taught that while the soul enters the person at birth, it does not fully manifest itself within the person until Bar Mitzvah. While the Jewish people were liberated from Egypt during Passover by G-d's direct intervention in their lives, they could not and did not internalize their relationship with G-d, until they received the Torah at Sinai.

And just as the Bar-Mitzvah can serve as a metaphor for the Sinai experience, the Holiday of Shavuot can help us better understand the true nature of a Bar and Bat

Mitzvah.

Tragically, for many children, and their parents, the Bar Mitzvah is the culmination of one's Jewish education, when, in fact, it is really just the beginning. For just as our first collective Bar Mitzvah at Sinai was the beginning of our peoplehood, so too, Bar Mitzvah marks the beginning of one's journey through life as a Jew.

Another lesson that can be applied to the analogy of Shavuot to a Bar Mitzvah. Just as Shavuot was not a one-time experience, but repeats itself every year during the Holiday of Shavuot, so too, one's Bar Mitzvah must be re-enacted every year. One's birthday is more than a time to make a party, but it is the time when the Bar-Mitzvah energies that were generated the year before are recreated.

Now, despite the analogy of Shavuot to a Bar Mitzvah, Shavuot is still only a sample of the ultimate Bar Mitzvah we will experience collectively when we reach our spiritual maturity when Moshiach will take us out of exile. As long as we are still in exile, we lack the necessary understanding and soul powers

to fully appreciate the depth and beauty of Torah and its commandments. Only when the knowledge of G-d will "cover the earth as the sea is covered with water" shall we really celebrate the idea of a Mitzvah to the fullest.

In addition to the Bar Mitzvah analogy, Shavuot has also been described as the wedding of the Jewish people and G-d. On a deeper level, the Bar Mitzvah and marriage metaphors are complementary. Our relationship with G-d (marriage) is based on our commitment to His commandments.

May this Shavuot be a joyous and inspirational one for all.